


# Executive Summary

Before introducing the evidence, a few words are in order  regarding some of the highlights of the year.

While it is true that there are activist organizations that are clearly aligned against the Catholic Church (Catholics for a Free Choice comes quickly to mind), more common are activist organizations that pursue an agenda that clashes with the public positions of the Catholic Church. Such was the case with the Population Institute.

In the fall of 1995, the U.N. Beijing Conference on Women addressed issues impacting on population growth, as well as matters that were exclusive to the concerns of women. In the period before the conference, the Population Institute, a Washington based population control group, mailed an appeal for money that implied that the Vatican was illegitimately engaged in pursuing its positions in the U.N. The Holy See, the Population Institute said, was acting as “an anti-contraceptive Gestapo.”

As a result of league pressure, Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, resigned from the advisor board of the Population Institute. Senator Barbara Boxer of California and Representative Robert Torricelli put the organization on notice that they would quit if another such incidence were to occur. Because of this reaction, we are confident that our message was heard by Werner Fornos, the president of the Population Institute.

Gay activists on both coasts were busy aiming their venom at the Catholic Church during their annual pride parades. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence made a splash in the West Coast and ACT-UP made its presence felt on the east coast. In New York, as a direct result of league pressure, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani put the word out that the police would not tolerate

in 1995 the kind of behavior that was tolerated in 1994 (men and women went naked in the streets and made obscene statements and gestures in front of St. Patrick's); he even decided not to march with the parade until it passed below St. Patrick's Cathedral, offering a genuflection of sorts to Catholic League demands.

Though the parade in 1995 was not as bad as the 1994 march, it was still vulgar. There were men dressed in bras and jock straps, women dressed as nuns—all of whom made their pro-abortion statement by carrying wire coat hangers—and many men who simulated oral sex atop floats.

The American Bar Association's Section on Rights and Responsibilities published in its summer edition a cover illustration that showed a pregnant woman lying on an operation table in a crucifix-like pose. Ready for an abortion, the woman's child was shown inside her body in a fetal position; the woman's hands and feet were fastened with band-aids. The purpose of this vulgarity was to bring attention to a story that raised serious questions about the merger of secular hospitals with Catholic ones. The league not only objected to the cover illustration, it found it ironic that a section of the ABA that prizes responsibility would act so irresponsibly.

The Catholic League was proud to publish a *New York Times* op-ed page ad greeting Pope John Paul II to the U.S. in October. We called attention to the fact that his words are often not heard by some elite segments of our society and that the time had come to listen to his message more carefully. We are pleased that, overall, the media treated the Pope fairly. But we were taken aback by the viciousness of the protesters who greeted the Holy Father. There is simply no legitimate role for vulgarity and incivility in any protest demonstration.

The Bravo cable network program, "Windows", featured one of the most despicable portrayals of Catholicism of the year. In

a dance routine called "Temptation," a hooker nun sexually "tempts" a priest. Worse, the choir is shown spitting out the Host. It is a tribute to Texaco that when the Catholic League registered its objections (the program was part of the Texaco Performing Arts Showcase), Texaco made a quick apology and promised to take remedial steps assuring that this would never happen again. Bravo, however, was nonplused.

Ellen Burstyn made it to Broadway with the play *Sacrilege*, but it flopped in no time at all. Though the play was not anti-Catholic, per se, it did what so many other productions do: it invited the audience to see Church authorities in a negative light and cast halos over dissenters. The gist was that those who are loyal to the Church are ignorant and oppressive while those who defy the Church are at once enlightened and victimized. This kind of political tendentiousness is perhaps all the more distressing because its offense against the Church is so subtle.

The year 1995 will be remembered by Calvin Klein as the year he was forced to withdraw his sexually suggestive ads. The Catholic League was only too happy to have been the principal stimulus behind Klein's decision.

When we saw that his underage models were not only dressed in a sexually provocative manner, but were adorned with Catholic symbols (a cross hanging from the neck of a girl model was prominently displayed on a Times Square billboard), we expressed our outrage by calling for a boycott. In a matter of weeks, Calvin Klein stopped this ad campaign and pledged not to run such ads in the U.S. again.

Benetton is a much more stubborn offender. Its Asolo boot campaign showed Jesus on the cross and Roman soldiers affixing nails to it. Alongside this mountaintop picture was the slogan, "DO YOU PLAY ALONE"; there were other comments that suggested that no one needs to be alone when they possess Asolo boots. The promotional flyer for the ad referred to

Jesus as "A regular man whose performance in life made him larger than any man in history." When confronted with a challenge from the Catholic League, Benetton offered nothing in the way of an apology.

The Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas succumbed to Catholic League pressure by taking down a Catholic altar in one of its lounges. We took out an ad in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, *El Mundo* and the *Desert Clarion* stating our objections and setting off a local debate. This method of response may be costly, but sometimes it is the only thing that can bring offenders to their senses.

One of the most acrimonious fights of the year pitted the Catholic League against **LifeLine**, the long-distance telephone carrier run by Evangelical Protestants. It seems that there are some Catholic organizations that are just "too Catholic" for **LifeLine** and that is why Karl Keating's organization, Catholic Answers, was denied inclusion in the program; Franciscan University of Steubenville and St. Joseph's Radio were also found to be beyond the pale.

When the Catholic League learned of this, we acted quickly and responsibly: we quit **LifeLine** and asked all Catholics, as well as non-Catholics, to do likewise. Unfortunately, dishonesty on the part of **LifeLine** made a bad situation worse; untrue statements about the course of events were disseminated by **LifeLine** to inquiring persons.

Higher education was the locus of several jabs at Catholicism. On the west coast, students at California State University at Fullerton were treated to the notoriously anti-Christian production, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. On the east coast, students at Middlesex County College produced what is perhaps the most anti-Catholic play ever made, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*. Governor Christie Todd Whitman of New Jersey refused to denounce the play even though it was financed with state monies.

At Regent University, the infamous Rev. Ian Paisley was welcomed by the student chapter of the Rutherford Institute. Paisley is the most well-known anti-Catholic bigot in Europe, thus it was quite distressing that he be given the right to express his anti-Catholicism on a American campus. What was even more shocking was that Paisley was speaking on a campus run by Evangelicals and was being sponsored by a student organization that is also run by Evangelicals.

To his credit, Dr. Terry Lindvall, the president of Regent, denounced Paisley's visit (he was out of town when the lecture was given). But there was no such apology from the Rutherford Institute: it defended Paisley on traditional free speech grounds (as if anyone has a right to speak at a private institution) and refused to condemn his bigotry. When I challenged attorney Rita Woltz of the Rutherford Institute to a debate on the campus of Regent, she declined the offer.

There is perhaps no source of anti-Catholicism that strikes a more negative chord with the Catholic League than bigotry that stems from the government. There are many in society who will not tolerate religious encroachment on government, but seem perfectly willing to tolerate state-sponsored anti-Catholicism. What makes this so disturbing is that the government is unusually protective of the rights of so many other segments of society, but somehow when Catholics are involved, that same paternalistic instinct seems to be missing.

It is hard to imagine a municipality tolerating a county-wide employee diversity program that used the forum for an opportunity to bash Jews, African-Americans and Native Americans. But that is exactly what has been happening in many places, including, as this report notes, in Hennepin County, Minnesota.

It is one thing to sensitize employees to the nature of gay bashing, quite another to lambaste Catholicism while doing so.

Labeling Catholicism as a “rigid and inflexible belief system,” and accusing the Catholic Church of having supported the Holocaust is cruel and dishonest. Charging the Church with an anti-homosexual agenda is similarly unwarranted. Instances like this prove that some diversity programs not only show no tolerance for Catholicism, they have an agenda to discredit the Church while promoting tolerance for others.

It is also hard to believe that a Jewish judge would be asked to recuse himself from a case simply because he had written with passion on the subject before him. Yet that is exactly what happened on the west coast when Judge John Noonan was presented with a case involving abortion.

Noonan, an authority on the history and legality of abortion, was asked to recuse himself from a case involving a firebombed abortion clinic on the grounds that his “fervently held religious beliefs would compromise his ability to apply the law.” Noonan’s response was classic: he reminded the attorney who made this motion that under the Constitution of the United States there is no religious test that bars people from holding public office.

The anti-Catholic parade that took place in the fall of 1995 in Eugene, Oregon was not only an ugly display of bigotry, it was an outrageous example of government sponsorship of anti-Catholicism. A group called the “Rickies” dressed as the Pope, priests and nuns, and did a mock dance on the steps of a Roman Catholic Church. And for this they were awarded a cash prize, the funds of which were secured, in part, from municipal sources.

When the Catholic League learned that Eugene Mayor Ruth Bascom refused to denounce the event, we took our case to the public by publishing an open letter to her in the *Register-Guard*. When even that didn’t shake her, we took the matter to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission; a decision has not yet been rendered in this case.

Again, it is not likely that any municipality would tolerate—much less reward with cash—bigotry against virtually any other group in society. The double standard as practiced here is almost ubiquitous, making certain that the Catholic League will be called upon time and again to respond with vigor.

Nineteen ninety-five was not a good year for media treatment of Catholicism. On radio, TV, the movies and in newspapers, there were many instances of unfair coverage and outright disdain.

The most explosive issue of the year clearly was the Disney-Miramax release of the movie "Priest." We objected not because the film showed five dysfunctional priests, but because it suggested that their depravity was a function of their religion. The cause and effect was unmistakable and so was the intent of the movie: quotes from writer Jimmy McGovern and director Antonia Bird removed all doubt that what was at work was an animus directed sharply at the Catholic Church.

The Catholic League held a press conference on the movie and was successful in getting Miramax, a subsidiary of Disney, to change the date of the opening from Good Friday. Miramax had the audacity to advertise our press conference, held in the Catholic Center of the Archdiocese of New York, as a joint press conference between the Catholic League and Miramax. I took great delight in showing the Miramax officials the door.

We called for a boycott of Disney and sent to Michael Eisner, the president of Disney, upwards of 100,000 signed petitions expressing outrage over the movie. The support we received from Catholic organizations like the Knights of Columbus (they dropped \$3 million worth of stock), and from noted public officials like Bob and Elizabeth Dole (they, too, sold their Disney stock), was impressive. We don't expect there will ever be a "Priest II."

Anti-Catholic ads were taken out in Florida's *Sun-Sentinel*, only to be stopped after a protest by the Catholic League. More mild mannered requests from area Catholics were initially ignored, setting the stage for the Catholic League. We issued a news release stating that we would take out ads along the highways and in the opposition newspapers registering our sentiments. The editors of the newspaper got the picture and acted responsibly by nixing all future such ads and extended an apology to Catholics.

The CBS show, "The Wright Verdicts", managed to offend Catholics in a particularly scurrilous episode just before the program was discontinued. This show, described more fully in the report, was laced with every negative stereotype of Catholicism imaginable. It does not exaggerate to say that this script was motivated by an attack on Roman Catholicism, with a story line wrapped around the bigotry.

From the pages of the *Orlando Weekly* came a column by Liz Langley that insulted Catholics by suggesting that non-Catholics "mortify your Catholic friends by setting [communion wafers] out with the hors d'oeuvres at a party." When comments like this are made, there is no other term to describe it than anti-Catholic bigotry.

The cartoons and the pictures speak for themselves. Many more could have been included but this sample is enough to sustain our point.

We hope that those who read this report will be struck, as we have, with the extent and depth of anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in our society. As Catholics, we do not seek victim status, but we do insist on a level playing field. That is not something we have achieved and that is why we will continue to make good on our mission of defending Catholics and the Catholic Church from defamation and discrimination.

**William A. Donohue, Ph.D.**



**President**