


Executive Summary

Examples of anti-Catholic bigotry that appear in this  report are culled from activist organizations, the arts, commercial establishments, education, government, the media and the workplace; acts of violence are also detailed. The commentary that follows will address each of these areas. But first a word about the difference between criticism of the Catholic Church and rank bigotry.

There is a difference between those who choose to disagree and dispute and those who prefer to disdain and disparage. There is a difference between criticism and insult. And there is a difference between dialogue and diatribe. Our concern is with the latter responses only. To be frank, it is not always easy to discern whether a line has been crossed. Context is surely important, as is tone. Patterns matter, too, for if we see that the same person or organization repeatedly comes to our attention, it suggests that something other than criticism might be at work. Inevitably, there is no substitute for sound judgment in making these assessments. In the end, the public will judge whether we have made the right calls or not.

There was no shortage of ill-will expressed by activist organizations against the Catholic Church in 1994. The anti-Catholic group, Catholics for a Free Choice, took to the airwaves lambasting the Vatican for its teachings governing the family. This was especially noticeable at the Cairo Conference and the Preparatory Committee hearings that preceded it at the U.N. Frances Kissling led a band of population control activists in a vain attempt to persuade U.N. member states to expel the Holy See from the Vatican. But that didn't stop Kissling, Bella Abzug and others from trying to discredit the Catholic Church.

The degree of anti-Catholic venom was so bad in Cairo that the Ambassador from Benin rose to say how "disgraceful" the

behavior was. Indeed, the booing that greeted Catholic delegates was so great that the Ambassador said he never saw anything like it. He was not the only one who noted that the incivility that was accorded representatives of the Holy See was so unprecedented that even acknowledged terrorists who have spoken before the august body have never had to endure such badgering. Evidently, the Church's positions on the integrity of the family and the rights of the unborn is so distasteful to some that they can't restrain from making vitriolic attacks.

If Cairo demonstrated anything, it is that there is a close alliance between the activists involved in the anti-natalist, feminist, gay and lesbian causes. The unifying thread between organizations like Planned Parenthood, the National Organization for Women and the various gay and lesbian organizations is their belief that all expressions of human sexuality are equally meritorious and that eliminating the consequences of unlimited sexual expression is a fundamental human right. As such, these organizations entertain a view of life that is anathema to Catholic doctrine. More important, it puts these organizations on a political collision course with the Vatican.

If there was one event in 1994 that activist organizations engaged in that was particularly offensive to Catholics it was the illegal gay march that took place up New York's Fifth Avenue on June 26. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani succeeded in getting a court order to stop the march (another, much bigger, gay parade had already been given the right to march up First Avenue), but when the group decided to march anyway, Mayor Giuliani not only allowed it to proceed with impunity, he ordered the New York Police Department to escort the criminals up the street. But it is what happened on Fifth Avenue that angered Catholics most of all.

The radical gay contingent that chose to march up Fifth Avenue did so for one reason: so that they could partake in an anti-

Catholic demonstration in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral. When the marchers reached the Cathedral, they yelled—in unison—four-letter epithets and pointed their middle fingers at those on the steps of the church. Some were dressed as Cardinals, others as nuns and priests, and many wore nothing at all. They sat down in the street, did satanic dances and generally showed as much disrespect as they could. No one was arrested, not even those who went fully naked through the streets.

What was particularly odious about this case was the refusal of anyone in the New York media to brand the marchers as anti-Catholic bigots. Yet had this happened in front of a Jewish synagogue or a black Baptist church, the charge of bigotry would have been quick and decisive. Indeed, it is doubtful that the Mayor would even have authorized the parade in the first place. And even though Mayor Giuliani is a Catholic, he not only allowed the march to take place,

he never blasted the parade for what it was—a vile, public exhibition of anti-Catholic bigotry.

The arts community weighed in with contributions to Catholic-bashing as well. Ron Athey not only put on several despicable anti-Catholic shows, he received public monies for doing so. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) showed in 1994 that it was not going to flinch from critics who have labeled some of what it funds as anti-Catholic. It is an outrage that Catholics, and others, are forced to fund Athey's abuse of Catholic imagery so that he can indulge in sexually explicit and vulgar statements. Yet when pressed on this issue, Jane Alexander of the NEA continues to recite the same old lyric about free speech, never questioning the right of artists to pick the pocket of the public to pay for their perversities.

Even commercial establishments proved not to be immune from anti-Catholic artists in 1994. Barneys of New York, the upscale clothing store, put a vulgar nativity scene in its

window on Madison Avenue and 61st Street, explaining to its critics that no one has any right to pass value judgments on the work of artists. The display, "Hello Kitty Cat," showed our Blessed Mother as a cat with six nipples exposed and her legs spread wide apart. Fortunately, the Catholic League was able to mount public pressure to get Barneys to pull the obscenity within hours after going public with our objections.

Catholic-bashing in the schools is a real problem and this is especially true at the level of higher education. Carnegie Mellon University, Western Michigan University, the University of Kansas, William Paterson College and Metropolitan State College in Denver all drew fire from the Catholic League in 1994. Though the incidents were different at each school, there was a common denominator: the Catholic Church was targeted because of its beliefs. What was most disturbing, however, was the extent to which administrators tolerated such intolerance, especially given the much vaunted interest in multiculturalism that all of them claim to have.

The Catholic League is concerned that programs in multiculturalism are actually fomenting the bigotry they claim to be fighting. Where is the evidence that suggests that respect for the traditions and beliefs of Roman Catholic students are taken seriously in such curricula? Where are the sensitivity seminars and workshops to stop religio-phobia from breaking out all over? Why is it that some cultures are to be valued more than others and that the Judeo-Christian heritage is fair game for bashing?

At the local, state and national levels of government, many incidents of anti-Catholicism were reported. In local communities, there was much dissension over the inequitable treatment that was afforded expression of the Christmas season. At least in some parts of the country, it proved to be quite controversial for nativity scenes to be placed on public property and in the schools, even when every precaution was taken to be in compliance with Supreme Court rulings on this

subject. Yet the placement of menorahs met with relatively little complaint, making Catholics, and Christians in general, wonder what was going on. They were even more perplexed to learn that at the federal level, there was an attempt to nix religious stamps.

The Catholic League was particularly disturbed by the lame response of Governor Christie Todd Whitman of New Jersey to a serious incident of Catholic-bashing at a state college. When the Catholic League asked Governor Whitman to do something about the outrageously anti-Catholic antics of Professor Vernon McLean, and the equally outrageous response of the administration, we got nowhere. It took Governor Whitman four months to answer our request for assistance and then we got nothing but a "I've-accepted-the-findings-of-the-college" type response. In short, the same woman who publicly condemned one boardwalk vendor for selling anti-gay T-shirts couldn't muster one word of protest over an egregious anti-Catholic incident at a school that is under her tutelage.

The Clinton Administration also drew fire from the Catholic League in 1994. We were particularly incensed with the way administration officials tolerated the Catholic-bashing that took place at the Cairo Conference. We took note, too, that even President Clinton's own Ambassador to the Vatican, Raymond Flynn, complained to the President in a letter about the "ugly anti-Catholic bias" that some in the administration have shown. Indeed, the Catholic League even paid for a half-page Open Letter to the President in the *New York Times* to address the bigoted remark of a State Department spokeswoman made just prior to the Cairo Conference.

This report cites many examples of bias in the media, including offensive cartoons. Do the newspapers ever caricature rabbis or ministers? Or do they only pick on the Pope, priests and nuns? It certainly does not exaggerate by much to say that they "only" pick on our clergy and religious. Sure, the hierarchal nature of the Catholic Church, coupled

with its countercultural positions, makes for an easy target, but the fact remains that there are lots of easy targets in society, yet only a few seem to be fair game. In short, the Catholic Church is not one of the sacred cows that the media like to protect.

When assessing anti-Catholicism in the media, it is important not to confuse criticism of Church policies with unadulterated bigotry. One index of bigotry, however, is the constancy of critical commentary to the exclusion of anything favorable. For example, those who read the columns of Margery Egan in the *Boston Globe*, or have read the pieces that Anna Quindlen used to write for the *New York Times*, are not wrong to wonder whether there is an animus at work. Why is it that they consistently choose to portray the Church in the most negative possible way? While any one column, standing on its own, might not warrant the tag of bigotry, the cumulative effect of persistently critical articles might very well merit such a charge.

Here's another example. The media like to report on divisions—contrived and real—within the Catholic Church. But few reports were as obviously shaded as the one that took place in the fall of 1994 when nuns protested in St. Peter's Square. The *Washington Post* gave it a big spread and the *Today Show* featured it as well. So what's wrong with giving wide coverage to nuns demonstrating in St. Peter's Square? When the number doing so is exactly four, it begs the question, "Just how few would it take for the media **not** to report on it?" Three? Two? One?

Bigotry in the workplace is another problem, though it is markedly different than the type that took place in the past. There was a time, not too long ago, when it was commonplace for Catholics to be excluded from jobs because of their religion. The more common problem these days, as this log indicates, occurs when religious symbols are displayed at works.

It must also be said that if a Catholic employee makes public his or her commitment to the rights of the unborn, problems on the job may very well be forthcoming. Indeed, college graduates who have been active in pro-life work would be well advised not to flag their contribution in a resume. But if the students were involved in abortion rights affiliations, that would be acceptable. Problems like these do not show up in a report like this because of the difficulty of proving bigotry, but anyone who is in a position to know about situations like this will verify its veracity.

It is our expectation that this report will provide skeptics with information that they might not have come upon otherwise. We also hope to educate fellow Catholics to the nature of the assault that is being waged against their religion. Most Americans are fair-minded people who, when presented with a record of indefensible behavior, will respond with indignation. The time has come to rally that indignation in a manner that is as constructive as it is effective. By issuing this report, the Catholic League hopes to contribute that end.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President