


# Executive Summary

“The Catholic Church is going to own the month of April.”  That’s what I told Fox News anchor Shepard Smith on April 2, the day Pope John Paul II passed away. Events soon validated my point.

I was speaking at the University of Notre Dame on March 31 when news reports about the impending death of the pontiff blanketed every radio and TV station, and by night’s end CNN interviewed me on the campus. The next morning, before heading back to New York, Don Imus interviewed me. The pope died the next day, and as fate had it, I was in the Fox News studio when the news broke. It was my good fortune to be in a position to comment on the legacy of Pope John Paul the Great before millions of viewers at this tragic moment.

The Catholic Church would “own the month of April” because of the events attendant to the pope’s funeral, and the selection of the new pope. Both proved to be an awesome experience, commanding the attention of people of every faith, as well as the faithless. The actual hard news coverage of these events was very positive, and we said so. What was not so positive was the response of some pundits and activists.

Not included in this report are the insulting comments made about Pope John Paul II by British transplant Christopher Hitchens. That’s because MSNBC-TV decided, quite rightly, not to air what Hitchens said about the pope during the week of the pontiff’s funeral. Hitchens, an inveterate Catholic-basher, made his attack during the course of an exchange with me. After he slammed the pope, I returned fire, and with that the angry polemicist went ballistic: he pulled his mike and went stomping out of the studio.

The elevation of Joseph Ratzinger to the throne of St. Peter was greeted with joy by most Catholics, but it triggered howls

of protest from the alienated. Pope Benedict XVI was no stranger to Catholic circles, and it didn't take long before his friends and foes would lock horns. The Catholic League, of course, rallied to his side without reservation. What bothered us was the extent to which non-Catholics jumped into the fray condemning the new pope. The audacity of these meddlers was mind-boggling.

The death of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist occasioned another media blitz. Who would take his place? What judicial philosophy would he or she entertain? Would any precedents be overturned?

When President George W. Bush named John Roberts to the high court, it was good news for those who prefer a more constrained court, and bad news for those who prefer a more activist court. We were pleased not only because Roberts respects the limits of judicial power, but because he is a practicing Roman Catholic who respects the teachings of the Magisterium.

It was Roberts' religion, as much as his views, that drove his critics mad. The things said about him demonstrated the vibrancy of anti-Catholicism in the U.S. today. That those who fancy themselves as "progressives" made the most vitriolic remarks is par for the course: many of them are among the nation's biggest anti-Catholic bigots.

Pretty much the same ones who attacked Roberts attacked Samuel Alito, a fellow Roman Catholic who was chosen after Bush's first choice, Harriet Miers, withdrew her name from consideration. Political partisanship derailed Alito's hearing until 2006, but that didn't stop efforts to mobilize the grass roots on both sides of the aisle. In this regard, the events of "Justice Sunday I" and "Justice Sunday II" loomed large.

It was the leadership of two prominent evangelicals, Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family, and Tony Perkins of the Family

Research Council, that was responsible for the "Justice Sunday" events. The purpose of these ventures was to rally support for religious liberty, judicial restraint and fair treatment of President Bush's nominees. By extending an invitation to me, Dobson and Perkins were sending a clear signal that the time had come for Catholic and Protestant traditionalists to join forces. I welcomed the bid and enthusiastically endorsed their efforts.

The first "Justice Sunday" event was held in April in Louisville, and the second was in Nashville in August. The turnout was massive: thousands attended in person, and some 70 million viewers were able to access the events live on TV. More important, our adversaries took note of what was happening, and they were none too pleased with the burgeoning Christian alliance. As I said in my remarks, Christians of a more traditionalist persuasion were not prepared to assume a second-class status vis-à-vis radical secularists. Not only would we not sit in the back of the bus any longer, we were ready to take control of the wheel!

And take control we did. Case in point: three TV shows in 2005 proved to be as vile as anything we've ever seen. The good news is that in each case our protest led the offending media outlet to cancel plans to rerun the objectionable episodes.

Playing fast and loose with the Eucharist is not something we take lightly, and that is why we registered a complaint with NBC for airing the February 22 episode of a sitcom, "Committed." In that particular show, two non-Catholics were mistakenly given Holy Communion at a Catholic funeral. The Protestant and Jewish male characters made several failed attempts to get rid of it, and finally wound up dumping it on a tray of cheese and crackers. The priest character, ever the boob, was portrayed as not knowing the difference between the Host and a cracker. By far the most offensive scene occurred when the young men accidentally flushed what they thought was the Host down the toilet.

The only good news about this case is that our complaint was handled swiftly and honorably by a high-ranking NBC official. Agreeing that what was aired was indefensible, he officially retired the episode.

Bad as that episode was, it was nothing compared to what Penn and Teller did to Mother Teresa, or what "South Park" did to Our Blessed Mother. In both of these instances, an explicit intent to harm the sensibilities of Catholics was evident.

At the end of May, I told the media that "In the 12 years that I have been president of the Catholic League, I have never witnessed a more vicious attack on Catholicism than what appeared this week on the Showtime program, 'Penn and Teller.'"

I was referring to the "Holier Than Thou" episode that aired May 23, 24 and 27. It painted Mother Teresa as a cruel, exploitative and dishonest nun who ripped off the poor while feigning service to them. Those responsible for this hate-filled attack stopped at nothing: "Mother F-ing Teresa" is what they called her, and what they said of the nuns who worked with her was even more disgusting. All this was said about one of the most revered persons in the history of India, and one of the most respected persons the world has ever known.

We mailed a tape of select portions of this broadcast to many interested parties, including the bishops. We held a press conference outside the New York hotel where Viacom (which owns Showtime) was holding its annual stockholders meeting, and we launched a nationwide campaign demanding that Viacom initiate a probe into what happened.

We didn't get exactly what we wanted, but we didn't walk away empty handed, either. Officials at Viacom got the message and decided never to rerun this particular episode. If they had any decency, they would have publicly condemned what happened.

Public condemnation is what we sought from Joseph Califano, Jr., the prominent Catholic public servant who sits on Viacom's board of directors. This time it wasn't Showtime, it was Viacom's Comedy Central that was the offender. The show: "South Park."

On December 7, the eve of the Immaculate Conception, and on the feast day itself (as well as two days after that), "South Park" took dead aim at the Virgin Mary in its "Bloody Mary" episode. It depicted a statue of the Virgin Mary spraying blood from her vagina at Pope Benedict XVI.

This is not humor. Mel Brooks gives us humor. This is hate speech. It is done intentionally to be injurious. It is the work of evil.

To his credit, Joe Califano wasted no time condemning this attack. At year's end, Comedy Central decided not to rerun the episode. Then word got out that they were bowing to pressure from the Catholic League, so the bigots said they might rerun it at another time. We'll see.

It is not just the persons responsible for "South Park" that are sick, it's the hard-core segment of their audience. We know because when the media picked up the initial story that "Bloody Mary" would not be rerun, we got deluged with the most incredibly obscene hate mail. We pay no attention to what these young men have to say about us (it's obvious from reading the mail who they are), but when they attack the Virgin Mary, that's a different story.

Sometimes we have to try and try again before extracting an apology. Such was the case when a commentator for the ABC-TV affiliate in Seattle, KOMO, offended Catholics and then dug in his heels when we sought an apology. We finally got one, but not without a struggle.

Ken Schram is another one of those middle-aged media personalities who was "raised" Catholic. In his mind, that

gives him a right to stab the Church with impunity. Commenting on a piece of public art that depicted a naked man reaching for a naked boy, Schram opined that “The sculpture might as well as be called the priest and the altar boy.”

Our correspondence with Schram proved how clueless he was. He was trying to lecture us about the problem of molesting priests in the Catholic Church, as if the few who have been found guilty somehow gave him the right to libel the more than 42,000 priests nationwide.

After getting the run-around by ABC, we finally got hold of Schram’s boss in Seattle. When he proved to be almost as clueless, we contacted the station’s corporate owner, Fisher Communications. Then we got the apology we were seeking.

Cases like the Seattle one are usually one-time stories. But we also have our perennials, issues that pop up every year—like the attempts to smear the good name of Pope Pius XII.

For the first two decades following the end of World War II, Pope Pius XII was almost universally hailed by Christians and Jews alike for the good work he did saving Jews from Hitler’s armies. Things began to change in the 1960s when a fictional account of the pope’s efforts, written by an anti-Catholic German, sought to blame him for being ineffectual. But it wasn’t until the 1990s that the anti-Pius crusade reached its crescendo. No longer content to charge Pius with passivity, the new critics came up with tags like “Hitler’s Pope.”

Fortunately, 2005 witnessed the publication of two important volumes debunking the prevailing mythology about Pope Pius XII. We are proud to say that the Catholic League bought hundreds of copies of each book, distributing them free to Catholic university libraries, as well as to many other institutions.

*The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII* was edited

by Jody Bottum and Rabbi David Dalin. It contains some of the most cogent essays ever written on the subject, penned by authors who are well acquainted with attempts to distort the pope's noble record. Rabbi Dalin released his authoritative work, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*, in late summer, and it quickly became a hit. Together, these books provide the intellectual ammo that is needed to combat the anti-Pius crowd.

These books also gave the Catholic League something to lean on when we challenged a flawed decision made by those associated with National History Day (NHD). The flier for a 2006 NHD event invited college students to enter a contest on the subject of "Taking a Stand in History: People, Ideas and Events." It said, "The student might choose an NHD topic involving a situation where a person or group failed to act. For example, what were the circumstances leading to Pope Pius XII's decision not to oppose Adolph Hitler before and during World War II?"

Such presumption about such a contentious issue struck us as untoward. We registered a complaint, citing the two aforementioned volumes, along with another new book, *Buried by the Times*, that took the *New York Times* to task for doing next to nothing to protest the Holocaust. And indeed we even quoted two editorials from the *New York Times* that commended Pope Pius XII for not being silent—like everyone else—during the war! We got an apology from the top NHD official, and the offending "example" was deleted from its promotional material.

As the year came to a close, we received more apologies. One came from Wal-Mart, the other from Lands' End. In both instances, Christians were unnecessarily offended: statements about the origins of Christmas, written to justify the dumbing-down of the federal holiday by the two retailers, were quickly denounced by the Catholic League. The situation with Wal-Mart was so bad that we called for a boycott. Within 48 hours, we got an apology and the offending statement was

excised; the person who wrote it was fired.

We got a whole lot of press at Christmastime over a comment I made criticizing President George W. Bush for sending a "Holiday" card that made no mention of Christmas. Actually, when I received my card in the mail, I was not initially offended, and that's because I assumed that all presidents authorized generic cards at Christmas. Then I learned that this was not true.

In fact, every president from FDR to Bush I had sent at least one card that explicitly mentioned Christmas while he was in office (the last being in 1992). It bothered me that the president was following President Bill Clinton's precedent of sending only generic cards, and not the precedent that his father honored. "This clearly demonstrates that the Bush administration has suffered a loss of will and that they have capitulated to the worst elements in our culture." That's what I told the *Washington Post*, and that's what wound up on the front page. The media had a lot of fun with that one.

The administration's decision to adopt a neutered holiday card may have been a poor one, but it was certainly not anti-Catholic; this explains why there is no mention of it in "The Findings" section of this report. But the other incidents that I've discussed, and many more, are recounted. We've also included a smattering of cartoons that we felt crossed the line. And acts of vandalism, some of them very ugly, are contained herein.

In addition to our usual sections covering activist organizations, the arts, business/workplace, education, the media and miscellaneous items, this year we decided to group the anti-Catholicism that accompanied three events: a) the death of Pope John Paul II, and the selection of his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, b) the nomination of John Roberts to the Supreme Court, and c) the attacks on Christmas. Readers can find them grouped, respectively, under "Papal



Polemics," "Ripping Roberts" and "The War on Christmas. This should facilitate the work of students, researchers and journalists.

After reading this report, some will say that we are too sensitive. Others will say our response was too timid. That's fine by us—we don't shy from criticism. Indeed, we hope to learn from some of our more astute critics. At the end of the day, though, we are forced to decide what constitutes anti-Catholicism, and what does not. As always, we try to distinguish between mere disagreements with the Catholic Church, and attempts to disparage it. The former is of little interest to us; the latter is what drives us.

Lastly, we make no attempt to weigh the motive of the offender. Why? Because in most cases it is impossible to discern with any degree of certainty what the intent was. What matters for us is effect. To put it differently, we must decide whether the outcome is sufficiently noxious as to qualify as bigotry.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President