


Executive Summary

The year began with the release of three major statements  by the Catholic League: a) a report on the Long Island daily *Newsday*, b) a comparative study of sexual abuse among professionals, and c) an open letter to the Jewish community.

In last year's annual report, I wrote that "*Newsday* is by far the most anti-Catholic" newspaper in the country. As evidence, I cited its unrelenting (and often patently untrue) criticisms of Rockville Centre Bishop William F. Murphy, along with other matters. Things got so bad in 2003 that I asked our staff to compile a report on *Newsday's* animus. In January 2004, the report was issued: we ran selections taken from the most biased articles that were written about the Catholic Church from January 2002 to December 2003.

Consistent with our approach, we did not criticize *Newsday* for its reporting on the failings of the Catholic Church. The scandal, as we have said over and over again, was not created by the media—it was the work of bishops, priests, lawyers, psychologists and others. The media, including *Newsday*, generally did a good job reporting on the scandal. Our problem with the Long Island newspaper was the steady drumbeat of negative, and often malicious, columns that were penned by its op-ed staff and its regular contributors.

We are happy to say that there was a dramatic turnaround by *Newsday* in 2004. Whether this was because our counterattack was finally being felt (our special report was sent to every priest in the diocese and we e-mailed every *Newsday* employee about it), or because major personnel changes were made at the newspaper during the year, is not known. Perhaps it was a little of both.

In February, we released a study that I had personally researched and written, *Sexual Abuse in Social Context: Clergy and Other Professionals*. It was not designed to minimize cases

of priestly wrongdoing; rather, it was designed to put the issue of sexual abuse in a context that made sense. That it was so well received by our beleaguered seminarians—if not by some Catholic observers—made it a truly worthwhile effort.

The report showed, in some detail, the extent of sexual molestation of minors as committed by the clergy of other religions. It also showed that the most common locus of sexual abuse was the home: that is where offending family members, relatives and family acquaintances committed their abuse. Perhaps the most revealing part of the report was the data on the public school industry. The problem of sexual abuse in the schools is startling, yet it gathers comparatively little attention in the media. All together, the report demonstrated that sexual abuse is a national problem that requires a national response.

Also in the beginning of the year, I wrote “An Open Letter to the Jewish Community.” It was written to advance an honest conversation with Jews over “The Passion of the Christ.” That so many Jews, as well as non-Jews, responded to my letter with enthusiasm and reasonableness was a source of a great satisfaction.

The point of the letter was to challenge the sheer demagoguery that characterized much of the response to Mel Gibson and his movie. Cheap talk about Jews being killed—as a direct result of seeing the film—were made by professors like Paula Fredriksen of Boston University, as well as by pundits and activists. But when the dust settled, there was not one act of violence committed against any Jewish person anywhere on earth. There were also no apologies from those who made the irresponsible predictions in the first place.

Catholic theologians also joined the anti-Passion brigade. Their anger was fueled by their own arrogance: they actually expected Mel Gibson to run his script by them for approval—as if he owed them something. And they tried to have it both

ways, as well: on the one hand, they accused him of not being a bona fide Catholic; and at the same time, they treated him as if he had a duty to report to them.

This report shows in numbing detail the war that was waged against this film. When at first the charge of anti-Semitism didn't work, the critics accused Gibson of fomenting violence. That didn't work either, so then they said it was too bloody. Shamelessly, the same movie reviewers who found such violent movies as "Saving Private Ryan," "Gladiator" and "Schindler's List" to be ennobling, now all of a sudden were horrified at the sight of blood. When this gambit failed, they said the movie was pornographic: that some of these same reviewers reveled at the sight of the Marquis de Sade practicing his perversions in the movie "Quills" was most telling.

On the part of at least some of "The Passion's" harshest critics, an anti-Christian animus was easy to detect. For example, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, expressed his worst fears when he charged that "[Gibson] is hawking it on a commercial crusade to the churches in this country. That's what makes it dangerous." In other words, it is not radical secularists whom Jews need to fear most, it is those church-going Christians. Not surprisingly, my letter to Foxman requesting he apologize to Christians went unanswered.

It would be a mistake to think that the movie was nothing but a source of contention. On the contrary, millions found in "The Passion" the most intimate connection with Jesus Christ they ever experienced. To say that the movie was life-transforming for some is no exaggeration. Reports surfaced in the U.S. and abroad about ex-cons who turned their life around after viewing the film. Indeed, for many Christians, the movie was able to service their spiritual needs in a way that even the best priests and ministers have not been able to do.

It is not impossible to fathom why some might not like the

movie. Perhaps it was too graphic; perhaps the foreign-language element was not attractive; perhaps the inspiring teachings of Jesus were not given their due; perhaps there wasn't much in the film that could appeal to those with little or no faith. All that much is understandable. What is hard to understand is the deep-seated hostility the movie elicited from many of the nation's cultural elites (e.g., see the section at the end of this report on "Maligning Mel").

It is one thing to be indifferent about a movie—we've all seen films that others like but for some reason are not our cup of tea. But that's not what happened with "The Passion." Driven by an almost maniacal hatred of the movie, pundits from coast to coast lashed out at it in a way that begs the question: Was it the movie that sent them over the top, or was it the fact that the script was based on the New Testament? To the extent it was the latter, it says something very disturbing about the nature of the discourse that colors the culture war.

Another prominent issue in the culture war that engaged the Catholic League was the fight over the Pledge of Allegiance. Michael Newdow, an angry atheist with an authoritarian streak, took his vendetta against the words "under God" in the Pledge all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. Oral arguments were heard on March 24, and on June 24 the high court decided that Newdow lacked standing to try the case.

The Catholic League filed a joint friend-of-the-court brief with the Thomas More Law Center supporting the right of public school students to utter the dreaded words "under God." The effect of the Supreme Court's decision not to hear the case was to uphold the constitutionality of the Pledge, but this is surely not the last word on the subject. Not until the high court rules on the actual merits of the case will this issue be firmly resolved.

The presidential campaigns of George W. Bush and John Kerry drew the Catholic League into the fray in several ways. Moral

values, especially as they affected the debate on abortion, embryonic stem cell research and gay marriage, brought a robust response from the league. Opposed to all three issues, we sought to cast the first two subjects as human rights issues, emphasizing the need to protect innocent life at all stages of development. With regard to same-sex marriage, our opposition was based on the primacy of the family, traditionally understood, and the need to maintain its privileged position in society.

As a matter of principle, the Catholic League has deliberately chosen not to align itself with either political party. We are quite happy not being the Catholic arm of either the Republicans or the Democrats, and we trust our members want to keep it that way. On several occasions, we have had to do battle with the leadership of both parties, as well as with individual office holders and candidates for office. That's the way it must be if we are to maintain our autonomy, a quality not unrelated to our legitimacy.

Having said this, it would be dishonest to say that we do not welcome the presence of Catholic politicians in public life. So when John Kerry became the apparent Democratic contender for the White House, we looked at his candidacy with certain interest. But the closer we looked, the more we discovered that there was hardly a public policy issue that the Catholic Church has addressed that Kerry didn't reject. Whether the subject was abortion (including partial-birth abortion), embryonic stem cell research, doctor-assisted suicide or school vouchers, Kerry's voting record was radically different from the Church's position on these issues. And while Kerry said he was opposed to gay marriage, he was one of only 14 senators not to endorse the Defense of Marriage Act, a bill that President Bill Clinton signed to assure the integrity of marriage in the states.

What made this so disconcerting was Kerry's insistence that he was a "practicing and believing Catholic." Many Catholics,

including not a few bishops, wondered how this could be, given the fact that Kerry's voting record was squarely at odds with the teachings of the Church in most instances. And when some bishops questioned whether his record on abortion disqualified him from receiving Holy Communion (Kerry voted with NARAL—the most extreme pro-abortion group in the nation—100 percent of the time), cries of violating the principle of separation of church and state were heard all over. Thus did this Catholic candidate for the presidency create problems for many in the Catholic community.

If someone had asked us at the start of 2004 what issue in the presidential campaign would engage the Catholic League, we would have named only one—the fact that the Democratic National Committee (DNC) had refused to drop Catholics for a Free Choice from the links section on its website. In 2002 and 2003, we spent a considerable amount of time and money seeking to get the DNC to drop its association with this notoriously anti-Catholic group. Finally, on April 8, 2004, the DNC unveiled its new website, and gone was the links section that tied the Democrats to Frances Kissling's despicable operation.

But little did we know that our involvement in the presidential campaign had only begun. By the end of the spring, we were taking aim at Kerry's Director of Religion Outreach, and by mid-summer we were going after the DNC's Senior Advisor for Religious Outreach. We effectively disabled the former director and we forced the latter to quit. Here's what happened.

Once we learned that the Kerry campaign had hired Mara Vanderslice as its Director of Religious Outreach, we immediately inquired about her. What we found about the 29 year-old was startling, so much so that we couldn't wait to tell everyone else.

Vanderslice was raised without any faith and didn't become an evangelical Christian until she attended Earlham College, a

Quaker school known for its pacifism. When in college, she was active in the Earlham Socialist Alliance, a group that supports the convicted cop killer Mumia Abu-Jamal and openly embraces Marxism-Leninism. After graduating, Mara spoke at rallies held by ACT-UP, the anti-Catholic group that disrupted Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1989 by spitting the Eucharist on the floor. In 2000, she practiced civil disobedience when she took to the streets of Seattle in a protest against the World Trade Organization. In 2002, she tried to shut down Washington, D.C. in a protest against the IMF and the World Bank.

As I said of Vanderslice in our news release of June 14, "Her resume is that of a person looking for a job working for Fidel Castro, not John Kerry." I then added, "Just wait until Catholics and Protestants learn who this lady really is."

That's when everything unraveled. As Julia Duin of the *Washington Times* wrote, the Kerry campaign was in a "panic mode" over Vanderslice's role. So what did they elect to do? They gagged her: she was strictly forbidden from speaking to the media. Had they fired her, at least she could have kept her dignity. But instead, they kept her on the payroll in an outreach position while denying her the right to reach out to anyone.

We couldn't believe what a blunder this was. Just ask yourself, would the Kerry campaign hire an anti-gay to conduct outreach efforts with the gay community? It would never happen. But people of faith were not exactly a priority group for the Kerry camp, so they never really bothered to cultivate them.

If the hiring of Vanderslice was a blunder, the hiring of Rev. Brenda Bartella Peterson was a death wish. How could the Democrats shoot themselves twice?

Once it was announced that Peterson was the DNC's choice to

become its top religious advisor, we checked her out. In no time at all, we found that she not only favored excising the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance, she was so passionate about it that she literally signed an amicus brief on the side of atheist Newdow. That's right—the DNC's new religious outreach person signed a brief that went before the U.S. Supreme Court trying to censor the words "under God" from the Pledge.

Once we blew the whistle on Peterson, she caved within a few days. Here's how she put it: "The whirlwind was more than I could just about stand. It was amazing." What was really amazing was that the Democrats never learned a thing after we exposed Vanderslice.

In fairness, there were some Democratic operatives who were not too happy with the way their party was handling these matters. People like Mike McCurry, John Podesta and Paul Begala knew that by offending people of faith, the Kerry camp was digging its own grave. But their voices were drowned out by others.

McCurry, former press secretary to Bill Clinton, explained that the secularists in the party were in control: "Because we want to be politically correct, in particular being sensitive to Jews, that's taken the party to a direction where faith language is soft and opaque." Kenneth Wald, a political scientist and director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Florida, was just as blunt: "There is a very strong tendency within the Jewish community to be worried about the people who are supporting Bush and Bush's tendency to promote Christian values from the bully pulpit."

Another aspect of the presidential campaign that beckoned a response from the Catholic League was the behavior of some members of the clergy. Like it or not, the IRS is empowered to take away the tax-exempt status of non-profit organizations that endorse candidates for public office. The same applies to

members of the clergy when they are acting in an official capacity (e.g., they cannot endorse a candidate from the pulpit, but they can say what they want informally at a parish picnic). In any event, what exercises the Catholic League is the double standard: Protestant ministers, especially in African-American churches, routinely endorse candidates with impunity. But let a Catholic priest simply mention his objections to an issue, e.g., abortion, and he is immediately the object of censure by pundits and legal activists.

During the presidential campaign, we made two formal complaints to the IRS. The first one was made against a Miami Baptist church for allowing the church to become the venue of a political rally. On August 29, 2004, Bishop Victor T. Curry of Miami's New Birth Baptist Church welcomed Rev. Al Sharpton, who ran against Kerry for the Democratic nomination, and Terry McAuliffe, the chairman of the DNC. As reported in the *Sun-Sentinel*, Curry "made no apologies for turning his Sunday service into a political rally." Both Sharpton and McAuliffe made naked partisan appeals to the congregation; McAuliffe went so far as to say, "Get out to vote and we'll send Bush back to Texas."

The second complaint was filed September 15 against two Protestant black clergy groups from Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania State Coalition of Black Clergy and the Black Clergy of Philadelphia. The former group endorsed Joseph M. Hoeffel for governor, and the latter group endorsed the incumbent and eventual winner, Arlen Specter.

If the Gibson movie consumed us in the first part of the year, and the presidential campaign kept us hopping in the middle part of the year, the annual attempts to censor Christmas engrossed us at the end of the year. Only this year was different—this time Christians fought back. And they did so with considerable success.

This report provides many examples of the anti-Christmas

animus that was evident throughout the nation. Activist organizations undertook many anti-Christmas efforts, and they are recounted in that section of the report. In the section on business and the workplace, there are several examples of attempts made to squash Christmas celebrations in the office. The section on education offers a detailed account of how many public schools sought to stifle Christmas. Bids by municipalities to ban Christmas can be found in the section on government. And the work of vandals—who destroyed nativity scenes—are located in the miscellaneous section.

Those who want to censor Christmas are, properly speaking, cultural fascists. With jackboot precision, they seek to use the club of the state to impose a secular regime on a nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles. There is no religious tradition that these fanatics can stand, and that is why they will use every legal and extra-legal measure available to whip the masses into line. They are the neo-totalitarians, zealots who pervert the First Amendment so as to subvert the moral foundations of liberty.

Those who think that the censoring of Christmas is a blue-state phenomenon need to consider what happened on the editorial page of the *Wichita Eagle*. The Kansas newspaper ran a “clarification” on December 8 that read, “A story in Monday’s paper referred to a tree that was lighted at Tuesday’s Winterfest celebration as a ‘Christmas tree.’ In an effort to be inclusive, the city referred to this tree as the ‘Community Tree.’”

On the other hand, as indicated, 2004 stood out as the year that Christians aggressively sought to reclaim Christmas. The Catholic League has made this a priority issue for at least a decade, but only in the last few years has it been evident that many others are also taking this issue seriously. Three things changed in 2004: a) the media, especially cable television and the Internet, decided to give this issue the attention it deserves, b) Catholic and Protestant legal groups

marshaled their resources to litigate these matters in an unprecedented manner, and c) individual Christians were mobilized in a way that surprised everyone.

Why did Christians react so strongly? Because they were energized by the success of Mel Gibson—his victory was their victory. Christians were also emboldened by their victories over the proponents of gay marriage: voters in the eleven states that had same-sex marriage on the ballot rejected the measure handily. Other initiatives, such as mandating parental consent for abortion, also won. The net result being that by the time the Christmas wars began, millions of practicing Christians had been sufficiently fired up by Gibson and the election that they were not about to lie down as usual.

In many ways, what is not in this report is as important as what made the cut. We get complaints from all over the country about alleged instances of bias or bigotry. Many of the issues are rejected because they are not within the domain of the Catholic League. Others are rejected because the facts don't stand up upon scrutiny. Still others are rejected because they are not deemed to be anti-Catholic, or at least not sufficiently so.

With respect to this last matter, the Catholic League considered and rejected appeals to protest the play, "Sin—A Cardinal Deposed." The play was a theatrical documentary based on the exact depositions of Cardinal Bernard Law. While it was not flattering of Cardinal Law, it was not anti-Catholic either. At no point in the production was there an attempt to paint with a broad brush, thus did it relieve our concerns.

What is also not in this report is a list of all the hate mail we received in 2004. Quite simply, the hate mail—as received via the Feedback section on our website, e-mail and postal mail (to say nothing of the abusive phone calls)—was so voluminous in 2004 that it would have filled several documents this size. To be clear, no one at the Catholic League

complains about criticism, including that with which we disagree. At issue is the quantity of mail we receive that is patently vicious and obscene. Bad as this is, nothing is worse than the deliriously hateful missives that target Jesus and Our Blessed Mother.

Reading this volume may inspire some to become active in the culture war. Others, like journalists and researchers, will find satisfaction in simply learning more about anti-Catholicism. Still others will approach it with ill-motives (we are not naïve at the Catholic League). We wish the inspired and the curious good luck.

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