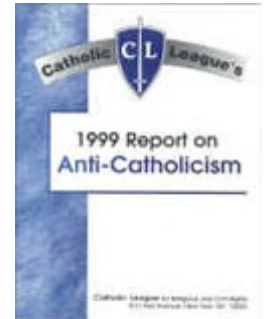


Executive Summary

Some of the highlights of 1999 are recounted here, drawn from the various thematic sections that make up this report.



There are many activist organizations in the nation which pursue goals that are in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church. This is clearly the case with pro-abortion groups. Unfortunately, when a conflict arises between pro-abortion groups and Catholic ones, it is not unusual to see prejudice come to the surface.

To be fair, there are Catholics who themselves are guilty of prejudice towards the religious or ethnic affiliation of the pro-abortion activists. But only someone hopelessly inflamed with ideology could possibly conclude that the problem is equally shared. Insensitive, even cruel, things are said by pro-abortion activists about Catholics. Take, for example, the way a pro-abortion group greeted Ted Turner's cheap shot at the pope.

Media mogul Ted Turner has earned a reputation for putting his foot in his mouth many times. He did at least that when in February of 1999 he went before the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association and berated the pope for not getting with the 20th century; he added some ethnic humor as well. "Ever seen a Polish mine detector?" is what Turner asked the crowd. He said this while lifting his foot toward the audience as if to crush the imagined object. Turner finished his remark by lecturing the pope to "get with it," adding, "Welcome to the 20th century."

The Catholic League sought, and instantly got, an apology from Turner. Our effort to have him suspended from baseball—the way Marge Schott was for making racial slurs—was dropped after baseball commissioner Bud Selig persuaded us that the analogy was not as tight as previously thought (Turner is not the principal owner; he never attends the meetings of the owners; he also owns a football team—to which no one sought any penalties—etc.)

But what was perhaps most disturbing about this episode (Turner, by the way, has made other anti-Christian statements in the past) was the way it was greeted by the pro-abortion activists. They loved it.

Now had Turner rabbit-punched a leading figure in the African-American or Jewish community, it is a sure bet that the crowd's reaction would have been much different. Indeed, even if one allows that Turner might be given to make such a remark, is there anyone who would doubt that he would elect to keep his mouth shut? This is the same guy, after all, who no longer does the “chop-chop” salute at Atlanta Braves games; to do so might offend the sensibilities of Native Americans, and that would be politically incorrect.

One of the most notoriously anti-Catholic groups in the nation is the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. They mock nuns in a way that is so vicious that it goes well beyond the bounds of parody. And it is not just nuns that they attack: obscene assaults on the Eucharist have repeatedly been made.

Sadly, just because “the Sisters” are non-violent, and occasionally contribute to charities, this seems enough to convince some observers that they should be given a pass for their offensive antics. We don't see it that way. If there were an Al Jolson society of white boys with black faces who mocked African Americans, no one would defend them because they give a few bucks to AIDS research.

It was with such reasoning that the Catholic League objected to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco when they were given the opportunity to hold a public festivity on Easter Sunday (they were first denied by the Department of Parking but then were overruled by the Board of Supervisors). The league asked the Board of Supervisors to refuse "the Sisters" a permit to engage in an anti-Catholic event on Easter Sunday on public grounds. This same group, we said, had held a "Condom Savior Mass" wherein condoms were distributed as Communion wafers, and even held a public exorcism of the pope when he visited the U.S. in 1987. None of this falls within the bounds of good humor. More properly, it is called hate speech.

The two-faced reaction of San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown was most disconcerting. He publicly sided with those who thought that "the Sisters" should choose another day for their celebrations, but he privately denounced the Catholic League for mounting a protest. Hostage to radical homosexuals, Brown gave voice to anti-Catholicism by not standing solidly against the bigotry of "the Sisters."

The ADL was also guilty of taking a two-faced stand: it advertises itself as an organization opposed to all forms of bigotry, but had no problem registering its outrage against the Catholic League's protest, never once criticizing "the Sisters" for their anti-Catholic behavior.

The Catholic League took out an ad in the San Francisco Chronicle stating its objections to the event. Media coverage of our reaction to the Easter Sunday event was quite good, ranging from USA Today to the "Today Show."

In the end, more than 7,000 homosexuals took to the streets the day of the event, holding a "Hunky Jesus" contest along the way. But our point was made: we galvanized unprecedented support for our position and got some members of the Board of Supervisors to switch to our side on a second vote. Just as

important, when “the Sisters” were scheduled to appear in a Gay Pride Parade later in the year in Nevada, Governor Kenny Guinn, who had previously signed a gay rights bill, took note by refusing to sign a proclamation supporting the march because of their inclusion.

If “the Sisters” triggered Catholic League activism in the spring on the west coast, the Brooklyn Museum of Art accomplished the same in the fall on the east coast. The publicly-funded museum played host, and as it turned out, pimp, to a British exhibition, “Sensation.”

“Sensation” featured displays of dead animals with maggots flying about, a bisected pig in formaldehyde, an enormous portrait of England’s most notorious child molester, and a painting, “The Holy Virgin Mary,” with elephant dung placed on Mary’s breast surrounded by pictures of vaginas and anuses. It was this last item, by the British-born artist of Nigerian ancestry, Chris Ofili, that ignited the Catholic League most of all.

If the animal abuse, obscenity and blasphemy weren’t enough to inflame, the corruption that colored the exhibition pushed the issue over the top. The owner of the art, Charles Saatchi, coughed up \$160,000 to the museum to inflate the value of the so-called art in the marketplace. Then tried to hide his unethical behavior from the public. Christie’s, the prestigious auction house, also contributed big bucks, and was given perks in return by the museum. Indeed, museum officials literally lied to the press when asked about these shenanigans.

But none of this mattered to the champions of the museum. This was art, they said, and no one but bona fide artists were in a position to judge the merits of the displays (ironically, by any rational measure, this would seem to exclude virtually everyone associated with the exhibition). As for the Catholic League, we argued that since art had now been reduced to dung,

public funding of the arts was indefensible.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani mounted a legal challenge to the right of the museum to use public funds in this manner. Though he did not prevail in the courts, and was opposed in public opinion polls for his stand, he did score politically with Catholics: his favorable rating hit 80 percent with this group in the aftermath of the protest. The Catholic League submitted an amicus brief against the museum.

Two protest rallies were held by the Catholic League at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The first occurred on October 2, the day the exhibition opened; the second was held on December 8, Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception.

At the first rally, the Catholic League staff passed out vomit bags; this was in response to the museum's warning that seeing the exhibition could induce vomiting. We readily concurred and thus sought to facilitate the process. We passed out "Vomit Bags" to the first 500 attendees, complete with an inscription that said, "Compliments of the Catholic League."

The league was happy to learn that following the opening of "Sensation," a similarly crude exhibition was canceled in Detroit, and the planned opening of "Sensation" in Australia was nixed. In both instances, the decision-makers cited the furor that accompanied the Brooklyn exhibition. This goes to show the prophylactic power of the Catholic League: we may not succeed the first go-round, but we can create enough pressure to win the next battle.

The world of business is generally not so exciting by comparison. But even here, the Catholic League finds reason to swing into action. Our engagement with CompuServe is illustrative both of problems in the workplace and our strategies for dealing with them.

Early in 1999, in the "What's New" section of the CompuServe website, up popped a quiz about how the Vatican was "built on

the site of the temple of a sect of transgendered priests." The pope was mentioned as "acknowledging" this "historical fact," and was said to apologize for Christian intolerance of transgendered people. Moreover, the statement read that "His Holiness confirms that henceforth only post-operative trans-men would be allowed to become Cardinals."

When confronted with our objections, a CompuServe official apologized for this "mistake." But then we learned that the offending statements had not been removed; they were simply moved from the "What's New" section to the "Transgender" forum. When another complaint was made, we were told that nothing could be done to stop people from using this forum.

We decided that the time had come for us to develop a forum of our own on the CompuServe website. We requested a Klan forum, one that would target blacks and Jews. That did it. Suddenly they got the message and quickly dropped the offending statements.

There are some issues that draw anti-Catholic venom from several sources. Take school choice, for example. There is much at stake in the debate over school vouchers, and there are many contours to this issue. Unfortunately, virtually every time this issue heats up, anti-Catholicism raises its ugly head. It did so most conspicuously in 1999 in Pennsylvania.

When Governor Tom Ridge placed his "Academic Recovery Act" before the Pennsylvania state legislature in May, the anti-choice crowd went mad. School superintendents from Bucks County signed a letter that compared the effects of school choice to the genocidal war in Kosovo.

"The current war in Kosovo is a graphic example of what happens in a society that separates its people and fosters elitism," the statement said. The school officials concluded that if the governor's legislation were adopted, it "may lead to the Balkanization of our society." All this would happen,

they contended, if we allowed the parents of poor children the same right to choose the school of their choice as presently exercised by the rich.

Going a step further was David J. Gondak, the head of the state's largest teachers union. He actually instructed his members to indoctrinate students with anti-choice propaganda. Gov. Ridge's proposal, he said, was "stealth voucher legislation," the kind that merited the label "voucher scheme." Worse, vouchers were fascistic: a photo of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was put on the home page of the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Not unexpectedly, the education monopoly received help from demagogues in the legislature. In this regard, no one came to their rescue more than Joseph Preston, Jr., a representative from Pittsburgh.

Preston reached for the bottom of the barrel when he said that school vouchers would enable certain religious schools to pay for the cost of lawsuits involving pedophilia. So as not to misunderstand which religion he was speaking of, Preston specifically referred to "certain religions hit hard by a lot of lawsuits," saying that "millions of dollars of certain faiths" were used to pay for court settlements.

"I don't want to see our money to be able to go for those different lawsuits for certain people who do not act appropriately," Preston commented. When pressed by the Catholic League to come clean, Preston got nervous, arguing he was not referring to any "religion," but to certain "systems." His attempt at clarification amounted to obfuscation, thus giving weight to the charge that he was appealing to anti-Catholic sentiments.

That Preston later apologized meant nothing. Not only did the bigots prevail in defeating the voucher bill, Preston refused to say which group he was apologizing to for his remarks.

When the Catholic League took on the U.S. Air Force and the Navy, some of our supporters wondered if we had overreached a bit. When we won both battles, the skepticism ended.

Over the summer, the Catholic League took on the Air Force when it learned that a young officer, Lt. Ryan Berry, was being penalized for refusing to serve with a woman in an underground missile silo the size of a school bus. Lt. Berry, who is married, said that as a matter of conscience—grounded in his Catholic upbringing—he would not put himself in an environment that would create “an occasion of sin.”

What angered the Catholic League was the Air Force’s change in policy: for 18 months, Lt. Berry had been granted a religious exemption from such an assignment. Then, responding to a few complaints made by other officers, the Air Force decided to take a politically-correct position by forcing the young lieutenant to take the assignment. When Lt. Berry balked, he was given a negative evaluation, thus calling into serious question his chances of ever getting a promotion (those who evaluated Berry strictly on his work performance gave him very high marks).

To call attention to this issue, the Catholic League sponsored a press conference on Capitol Hill on August 4. This effort garnered considerable public support for Lt. Berry. Significantly, he was supported by John Cardinal O’Connor of New York and Archbishop Edwin O’Brien of the Archdiocese of Military Services, U.S.A. The Becket Fund provided legal assistance to Lt. Berry, following the initial work of attorney Henry Hamilton. Representative Roscoe Bartlett of Maryland, as well as many other congressmen, stood squarely behind the young officer.

At the end of the year, Lt. Berry received the good news: he was promoted to the rank of captain. This was a gratifying moment for the Catholic League as many of our members had pressured the Air Force to reassess its position.

The Catholic League's fight with the Navy also had a happy ending, the principal beneficiary of which was our good friends at the Knights of Columbus. But not before unnecessary harm had been done.

In a very strange decision, the Knights of Columbus were barred from meeting in a naval base in Chesapeake, Virginia. The reason? The Knights discriminate against women.

The Catholic League jumped on this immediately, arguing that the Department of Defense directive that bars "unlawful discrimination" allows for discrimination which is lawful. It was unreasonable to assume, we said, that the K of C, which has a unit for women as well as men, was engaged in discrimination. Separate rest room facilities exist on the base (and elsewhere), yet no one thinks that such accommodations are discriminatory. The same logic applies to the Knights.

As with the case with the Air Force, we appealed to our members to write to the appropriate officials defending the Knights. It didn't take long before the Navy issued an apology and the ban on the K of C was rescinded.

The largest section in this report is on the media. It would be unfair, however, to assume that therefore the media are more responsible for Catholic bashing than any other source. The term is so encompassing, especially these days, that it can be misleading to treat all the subsections of the media as if they were one. Hollywood and the internet have some things in common, but they also have much that merits treating them discretely.

One of the TV shows that used to bother the Catholic League, "The Simpsons," no longer does. And that is because Fox finally got the word that the league did not take kindly to the Catholic bashing that marked the show. Here again, our members proved to be decisive.

Repeated appeals to our members in our monthly journal, Catalyst, to write to Fox complaining about "The Simpsons," paid off in June. That was when word came from on high that future episodes of the cartoon series should not be offensive to Catholics. Roland McFarland, vice president of broadcast standards at the network, advised that it was okay to target "Methodists, Presbyterians or Baptists"—any group but Catholics. The cited reason for the change: pressure from the Catholic League.

The reaction by Howard Rosenberg, a media critic for the Los Angeles Times, to the Fox decision was interesting, to say the least. To McFarland's comment, Rosenberg raised the question, "Different standards for different religions?" Now that's a bizarre way to think about the issue. Instead of objecting to bigotry against Protestants, Rosenberg instead questioned the propriety of not bashing Catholics.

Nothing absorbed more of the resources of the Catholic League in 1999 than its protest of the movie, "Dogma." Written and directed by Kevin Smith, the film was about as dumb and boring a comedy as ever hit the screen. But that didn't stop the movie critics from liking it, nor did it impact on our decision to brand it anti-Catholic.

The Catholic League protest of "Dogma" actually began on July 17, 1998. That was the day we told Disney that "it looks as though Catholic sensibilities will be offended once again"; Miramax, which is owned by Disney, was slated to release the movie. Disney chief Michael Eisner never replied to our letter, but later events proved he got our point.

On April 5, we sent a news release to all the major media outlets in the nation, as well as to Disney and Miramax. "If the movie is anything like it is shaping up to be, Mr. Eisner will surely regret not having engaged the Catholic League in dialogue."

On April 7, Miramax faxed a letter to the Catholic League stating that the Disney/Miramax label will not appear on "Dogma." That was good news. But the statement also said that Miramax co-chairmen, Bob and Harvey Weinstein, were going to personally buy the film rights to the movie. In response, our press release was appropriately titled, "Disney Dumps 'Dogma': Weinsteins Still Defiant." It ended with the statement, "One thing's for sure—Eisner is a lot brighter than the Weinsteins."

Now that Kevin Smith and the Weinstein brothers were the target, a game plan on how to handle "Dogma" had to be established. It was decided that our protest would break like a wave, with salvos being launched at the beginning, middle and end of summer (the movie opened November 12).

June 23 was the date of the first strike. We hit the op-ed page of the New York Times with an appeal to Disney that they should dump Miramax the way they did "Dogma." The second strike occurred on August 2 when we announced the release of our "Dogma" booklet; it detailed the frank comments that movie reviewers made describing the anti-Catholic nature of the film (the movie had been shown at the Cannes Film Festival). The third salvo was our New York Times op-ed page ad of September 12; it accused Kevin Smith and attorney Dan Petrocelli of trying to censor us.

The attempt by Smith and Petrocelli to silence the Catholic League was the most hideous aspect of the entire "Dogma" episode (Petrocelli is an attorney for the Weinsteins; he is also the L.A. lawyer who beat O. J. Simpson in the civil suit). They literally said that they would hold the Catholic League legally responsible for any violence that might take place over the protest of the movie. This was nothing but an attempt at gag speech, a desperate move to squash the Catholic League protest dead in its tracks. But it didn't work.

Before explaining my response, it is worth recounting how and why this happened. We need to back up a bit to do this.

In a Catholic League news release of April 8, I replied to actor Ben Affleck's revealing statement that "The movie is definitely meant to push buttons." My reply was "The Catholic League has a few buttons of its own to push, and we won't hold back." This was a fairly innocuous remark, but on June 16, I received an Overnight Priority Federal Express letter from Petrocelli that sounded the alarms over this comment.

"Statements like these may be interpreted to announce or imply an intention by the League to go beyond the bounds of legitimate and peaceful dissent or protest, and to stimulate, motivate, or incite danger or violence," said Petrocelli. He then promised to hold the league responsible for any violence that might occur when the film appears.

A reporter from the Boston Globe asked me to explain why it took Petrocelli over two months to make his move (over my throw-away line!). I told her that the only thing I had done about "Dogma" since April was on June 15: that was the day that the lawyers for the New York Times saw my op-ed ad for June 23 (they had to approve it)—the ad that asked Disney to dump Miramax. Petrocelli's fascistic letter arrived the next day, June 16. Curious, isn't it?

In any event, when I got Petrocelli's letter, I had only one response. I sent him a memo indicating that I had received his "threatening letter," and even took the time to tell him that our correct address was 1011 First Avenue, not 101 First Avenue. "Please make a note of it," I instructed.

One of the pet peeves of the Catholic League is the extent to which non-Catholics stick their noses into the affairs of the Catholic Church. Many are like voyeurs looking into the Catholic Church, picking away at all that they dislike. In 1999, the year ended with the grand-daddy award for voyeurism being given to the Kansas City Star.

In October, the Kansas City Star, Missouri's largest newspaper, conducted a sex survey of Catholic priests. The

questions centered around HIV and AIDS; the motive for doing so, it seemed plain, was to undermine public support for the Church's teachings on homosexuality and celibacy. In fact, the last two questions in the survey asked the respondent whether he thought the Church's teachings in this area should be changed.

When the Catholic League learned of the survey, our response was to fight fire with fire. So we instituted a survey of our own: we inquired of the sex lives of the editors and reporters of the newspaper, mailing our survey to the whole lot of them. In almost every regard, our questions were identical, as was the cover letter. But we did make some changes.

The Kansas City Star asked, "Do you know any priests with HIV or AIDS?", so we decided to ask, "Do you know any journalist who doesn't have HIV or AIDS?" They got the point. Quick. Unlike the newspaper, we did not hide our intent: "Our objective is to undermine your efforts at Peeping-Tom journalism."

Most of the issues tackled by the Catholic League are one-shot deals: once the event is over, so is the league's interest in it. This is not true, however, of historically-debated questions such as the role the Vatican played in the Holocaust.

During and after World War II, Jews the world over praised Pope Pius XII for his rescue efforts during the Holocaust. This was also true at the time of his death in 1958. Indeed, it wasn't until a play was made, "The Deputy," that anyone seriously thought of Pius XII as anything but a hero. The play appeared in Germany in 1963 and hit Broadway the following year. It contended that Pius XII had been silent during Hitler's reign of terror.

Over the past two decades, critics of Pius XII have multiplied, but their evidence has not. What is at work here is more propaganda than scholarship, more emotion than truth

seeking.

No one's agenda to get Pope Pius XII is more transparent than that of the English journalist, John Cornwell. In a particularly deceitful account, Cornwell marshaled arguments to buttress the accusation that Pius XII was, as the title of his book says, Hitler's Pope. What he didn't marshal was evidence.

No one was more willing to swallow Cornwell's moonshine than the editors at Vanity Fair: they published an excerpt from his book. It was not lost on the Catholic League that Vanity Fair, owned by Condé Nast, had a particularly lousy track record on matters Catholic. In 1990, the publication savaged John Cardinal O'Connor; in 1995, it attacked Mother Teresa; and now it was assaulting Pius XII.

Our response was to place a full-page ad in the New York Times that effectively called the question: "Condé Nast Has A Problem With Catholicism." We then pressed our case and defended the three Catholic stalwarts. More than anything else, however, we wanted to directly confront Cornwell himself. But that was not to happen.

When Cornwell was about to make his book tour of the U.S. in the fall of 1999, I relayed to him—via ABC-TV of Philadelphia—an invitation. I promised to give him a one-week, all expenses paid vacation in New York (sponsored by the Catholic League), provided he agree to debate me every day on radio and TV. He formally declined my offer on September 10.

What makes Cornwell so distasteful is his dishonesty. As the Vatican has been able to demonstrate, he misled the public regarding the length of his archival research and the nature of his disclosures (e.g., "previously never-published documents" had, in fact, been previously published). Most disconcerting, however, was the way Cornwell sold himself as a "devout Catholic" to the public.

In 1991, Cornwell wrote that he had become “increasingly convinced that human beings were morally, psychologically, and materially better off without a belief in God.” To punctuate his point, he added that “nothing short of a miracle could shake these firm convictions.”

Well, if the Cornwell of 1999 is to be believed, then he must have experienced a miracle sometime during the Nineties. That no one who interviewed him bothered to ask about this—indeed never even bothered to question his alleged “devout Catholic” status—is as scandalous as is his case against Pius XII.

The critics of Pope Pius XII are not going to go away. Neither are those who, like the Catholic League, are convinced that he is being scapegoated and maligned by those with an agenda.

When all is said and done, the evidence in this report speaks for itself. Our goal is to combat anti-Catholicism and thereby witness its decline. We are not an all-purpose moral elixir trying to check all the latest outrages. The one and only mission of the Catholic League is to make American society safe for Catholicism. Whether the voice of the Church proves to be persuasive is not our problem. Whether that voice gets a fair hearing is.

William A. Donohue
President