

# Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas Offends Catholics

When the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel opened last March in Las Vegas, it featured a restored carved gothic altar in one of its cocktail bars, the Viva Las Vegas Lounge. The offensive use of the altar has been a source of criticism by many area Catholics, among them Bishop Daniel F. Walsh of the Diocese of Las Vegas.

As soon as the lounge opened, Bishop Walsh registered his concerns with Peter Morton, the owner of the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel chain. Morton assured the Bishop that plans were underway to remove the sacrilegious use of the altar. However, despite repeated promises that the altar would be removed, seven months later it is still standing, and that is why the Catholic League got involved in the matter.

The Catholic League outlined its strategy to the press:

“For seven months, Bishop Walsh has labored to get Peter Morton to remove the offensive use of the altar at the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel in Las Vegas. At every juncture, promises have been made to remove the altar and still nothing has been done. Indeed, the bartenders who work at the Viva Las Vegas Lounge in the Hard Rock establishment openly scoff at the idea that plans are underway to remove the sacrilegious use of the altar. Accordingly, the time has now come to put public pressure on Mr. Morton.

“The Catholic League will contact the media in Las Vegas about this incident, and will alert the national media to it as well. We will also take out ads in the local newspapers, as well as the diocesan newspaper, requesting Catholics not to patronize the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel and to organize demonstrations in front of the establishment. We will also

contact local Catholic organizations to organize phone trees and deliver their message straight to Mr. Morton. If more pressure is needed, we will bring it to bear, including a national boycott of all Hard Rock Cafes."

The Catholic League followed through on its promise by taking out three ads in area newspapers: The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (the most influential newspaper in Las Vegas), *El Mundo* (the Spanish newspaper of record) and the *Desert Clarion* (the diocesan newsletter). A copy of the ad as it was submitted to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* appears below.

However, the ad as it appeared was altered without permission of the Catholic League. Deleted from the ad was the name of Steve Cavallaro. More important, the hotel management number, (702) 693- 5000, was substituted for Cavallaro's number, thereby bypassing the culprit.

When the story broke, Cavallaro called Dr. Donohue and denied that the altar was an altar. He said it was "a wooden object found in someone's basement." When Donohue asked him what the public would say if, for example, ten people were randomly chosen off the streets of Las Vegas to say what they thought the object was, Cavallaro said he wasn't sure what they would say.

Hard Rock says it will remove the altar on November 30. Ironically, they are now thinking about putting the altar in a wedding chapel within the hotel. That being the case, it settles the matter as to what the object is: why would they want to put "a wooden object found in someone's basement" in a chapel?

The Catholic League will announce its next move once it finds out what happens on November 30.