

# League Draws Venom From Critics

There are several ways I can measure the success of the Catholic League. When I receive kind words from people like Bishop Dudley of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, or from people like Roger McCaffrey of the *Latin Mass Magazine*, I know we're on the right track. When the media keep calling us for interviews, that's a good sign. When we're getting new members by the boat load, that's an important statement. When our members continue to be generous, that's another indication that things are going right. But as important as all of this is, it's just as important to be taken seriously by our adversaries. The good news is that that has been happening as well.

One way to judge whether an advocacy group like the Catholic League is having an effect on society is by considering the response of its critics. On this basis, too, we seem to be doing a pretty good job. Three organizations that have an adversarial relationship with the Catholic League are Catholics for a Free Choice, Gay Men's Health Crisis and Planned Parenthood. All three have paid us rather back-hand tributes as of late.

Just recently, I asked part-time worker Alexa Rodriguez to call Catholics for a Free Choice and obtain the addresses of those other renegade Catholic groups that signed an ad in the *New York Times* taking issue with the Vatican. Initially, Alexa received a warm reception, but then when she was asked to identify what organization she was with – and duly replied – the employee from Catholics for a Free Choice quickly slammed downed the phone. I guess it's safe to say that the League is no stranger to the gentle- persons who work for Frances Kissling. Now if they're tired of us already, only time will tell how they'll greet us down the road.

We got a different response from some other critics. In September, a reporter from the local NBC-TV news station visited my office for an interview. He wanted a comment on the second round of our anti-condom subway ads. After the interview, he said that he had tried to get an interview with a spokesman from Gay Men's Health Crisis, but was told that no one from the group would cooperate. Readers will remember that this was the organization that was responsible for getting the Catholic League involved in the condom fray in the first place. Though previously this group showed no reluctance in issuing statements against the Catholic League, or in sending someone to debate me on TV, the group has now gone mute, an indication that it does not want to give us more publicity.

But the reporter did find someone from Planned Parenthood to comment on our ad. Having once previously dealt with a representative from Planned Parenthood, I fully expected that a public relations spokesman would make some remarks. But instead, it was Alexander Sanger, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood (he is also the grandson of supreme eugenicist Margaret Sanger) that went before the cameras. He complained, of course, but what he said was not as important as the fact that he felt impelled to make the statement himself.

It appears that Mr. Sanger has been thinking a lot about us lately. His little newsletter, which reaches millions of corporate and government types, suggests that Sanger is quite upset with the Catholic League. The September 6th edition is a case in point. In it, Sanger writes that the League's anti-condom ads "have been plastered in virtually every subway car and billboard throughout the City's five boroughs."

An exaggeration, to be sure, but we'll take it anyway.

Sanger also quoted New York City Health Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, saying that our ads promote a "life-damaging" message. These "dangerous" ads, as Sanger puts it, are coming

to the public from the “Radical Right.”

This kind of hyperbole demonstrates that the elites are worried. Surely they know in their heart of hearts that those who make the case for restraint, as opposed to condoms, are not sending messages that are “life-threatening” and “dangerous.” After all, it is not restraint – but the antithesis of it (it’s called license ) – that allows young boys and girls to become “sexually-active” before their time.

Think of it this way: we don’t tell “physically-active” teenagers to protect themselves from violence by wearing bullet-proof vests, we simply tell them to stop. While it is true that doing violence to an innocent person is always morally wrong, and having sex can be perfectly legitimate, e.g. as in marriage, it remains true that kids should no more be engaged in sex than they should be engaged in violence. Context matters as much as conduct when assessing the moral order of youth.

It is impossible to read Sanger’s newsletter without wondering whether the guy is a bigot. He seems determined to silence debate on important public issues by labeling anyone who disagrees with the wisdom of Planned Parenthood as a member of the “Radical Right.” That this term more appropriately refers to terrorist groups like the Klan and Nazis, and not to groups that prefer counsel to condoms, is not unknown to Sanger; it’s just that he couldn’t resist the temptation to be demagogic. But if the Catholic League, which extols the virtue of restraint, thereby qualifies as a member of the “Radical Right,” what term would accurately describe an organization that wants to make abortions available to 12 year-olds behind their parents’ back?

If Sanger isn’t a bigot, why does he say that “the Radical Right, led by Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition and the Roman Catholic hierarchy” want to “take over the nation’s public schools”? Why does he write that the concept of

“secondary virginity,” a term used to describe the efforts of young people to abstain from sex after they have lost their virginity, has surfaced in New York as a result of “heavy lobbying by the Roman Catholic hierarchy”? Why does he find it necessary to say that the abstinence-based “Sex Respect” program was “written by a Catholic educator”? Why does he say that the New York Catholic Conference “aggressively lobbied” against school-based health clinics?

Unless one is terribly naive, it should be obvious that Sanger is not engaged in a descriptive enterprise: his goal is to red flag the Catholic Church to Planned Parenthood supporters. “Here they come again,” is what Sanger is really saying, “those same people who continually cross church and state lines are at it again trying to impose their sexually regressive views on the rest of us.” That is what Sanger is conveying, and he knows it.

It is as clear as clear can be that Alexander Sanger would like to insulate society from all Catholic influences. Luckily, he can’t. The battle for the culture will continue to be joined by the Catholic Church, Planned Parenthood and the others notwithstanding. And standing there to defend its right will be the Catholic League.