

League Threatens RICO Action Against ACT-UP; Demonstration at National Shrine Fizzles

By William A. Donohue

As an anti-defamation organization, much of what the Catholic League does is reactive in nature, that is, we respond to instances of bias and bigotry. But given the times we live in, it is not always acceptable to wait until problems emerge. Being pro-active has its risks, but being passive is not without risks either. The recent near confrontation between the gay outfit ACT-UP and the Catholic League is a case in point.

During Holy Week, ACT-UP spokesman Wayne Turner announced that his group was going to demonstrate against James Cardinal Hickey and possibly break into the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on Easter Sunday while the Cardinal was saying Mass. Upon hearing of this, the Catholic League immediately made an announcement of its own: try it and we'll sue under RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act). On Easter Sunday, ACT-UP protested outside the church, but never attempted an invasion.

ACT-UP, which is no stranger to church-busting, was angry with Cardinal Hickey for the remarks he made in a letter to President Clinton. The Cardinal was justifiably outraged over the irresponsible statements that Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the Surgeon General, made in her March 22nd interview in the *Advocate*, a gay magazine. Dr. Elders, who has a track record of Catholic-bashing, took another swipe at those whose religion she disagrees with by crudely characterizing Catholic teaching on sexuality. She also went so far as to endorse homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. It would take too

long to list all of her amazing comments. Suffice it to say that I discussed this matter with Pat Buchanan for one hour on his radio show and still didn't cover all the issues .

It comes as no surprise that in a democracy there will be many competing voices on virtually every issue. But democrats are committed to resolving their grievances peacefully. To do otherwise is to abet anarchy, and anarchy, as Aristotle knew, typically abets despotism. So when ACT-UP said that it might invade the nation's largest Roman Catholic Church on Easter Sunday, we took them at their word and issued a news release alerting the media to our pledge: if ACT-UP invades, the Catholic League will sue. More than that, we'll use RICO.

RICO is the law that was originally intended to be used against organized crime but has more recently been used against anti-abortion protesters. Ideally, the application of this law should be limited to its original intent. But if those whose agenda we do not share are willing to use it, with the blessings of the court, against pro-lifers, then surely RICO can be, and indeed ought to be, used against church-busters.

In the news release, I said the following: "Invading houses of worship is what Nazis do, and there is literally no difference between busting into a service in a synagogue and busting into a Roman Catholic church during a Mass. Both are equally despicable acts of terrorism." I added that "What ACT-UP is threatening has nothing to do with civil disobedience: it is terrorism, pure and simple."

No doubt there are some who think this response is too strong. They would countenance dialogue. Dialogue is fine, but in order for it to have a chance of succeeding, both parties must be willing to abide by the rules of civilized discourse. The evidence suggests that ACT-UP is not interested in talk. It favors assault. It also needs to be said that passivity during war does not yield peace; it more typically yields bloodshed,

as well as the loss of liberty. And that is not a prospect the Catholic League is willing to accept.