

LENO APOLOGIZES TO ASIANS BUT NOT CATHOLICS

Longtime NBC “Tonight Show” comedian Jay Leno has come out of retirement to apologize to Asian Americans for the bigoted jokes he told about them while hosting the late-night show. But there was none for Catholics.

From 1997 to 2015, Bill Donohue wrote well over a dozen news releases taking Leno to task for insulting Catholics; he only addressed Leno’s most offensive remarks. For example, our files show that in one time period alone, from April 1996 to January 2012, we recorded 37 jokes Leno told about Catholics, some of which were inoffensive and some of which were not (only the latter merited a news release).

Whenever we received a complaint,” Leno recently said, “there would be two sides to the discussion: Either ‘We need to deal with this’ or ‘Screw ’em if they can’t take a joke.’” Regarding his anti-Asian jokes, he now recalls, “Too many times I sided with the latter even when in my heart I knew it was wrong.”

In the late 1990s, Leno concluded he needed “to deal with” a complaint Donohue lodged. He called Donohue in February 1997 to discuss his concerns; Donohue posted a news release following the discussion. He explained to Leno “why jokes about the Eucharist are not synonymous with jokes about Catholic school traditions.” Leno said he understood the distinction. He added that he tells 11,000 jokes a year and may sometimes go over the line. Fair enough. The conversation ended amicably.

Unfortunately, a few years later Leno started in again. Most of his favorite “jokes” portrayed all priests as molesters. Evidently, he took the “Screw ’em if they can’t take a joke”

approach; he never reached out to Donohue again.

All we have ever sought at the Catholic League is parity. We don't ask for preferential treatment vis-a-vis other groups. We simply want a level playing field. Regrettably, that remains an elusive goal.