

LETTERS

Vanity Fair

April 2003

The Great Debate, Continued: Christopher Hitchens, Catholic League hero?...

Rarely is there an article on abortion worth reading anymore. That's because both sides are so utterly predictable that it's a waste of time. Christopher Hitchens's contribution, however, is the exception to the rule ["Fetal Distraction," February]. As one who has sparred with him before, I commend Hitchens for his courage and honesty in dealing with this most divisive of issues.

William A. Donohue

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Newsday

February 21, 2003

Murphy's Not to Blame

There is not a single Catholic I know who is not angry, hurt and dismayed by the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. There is never an excuse for molesting minors and it is even worse when those in positions of authority turn a blind eye to it. But it is also true that nothing justifies unfair accusations.

Closer to home, the reaction against Bishop William Murphy of the Rockville Centre Diocese has been incredibly unfair. The problem on Long Island must be put squarely on the doorstep of Bishop John McGann. Murphy is to blame for none of the

problem: 100 percent of it goes to McGann. And that is why it is so obscene to hear people calling for Murphy to resign. He may still have to defend his record in Boston, but on Long Island the verdict is in: He's innocent.

Not only is Murphy innocent, he moved with dispatch to get rid of problem priests. Let me be specific. We all know now that the Rev. Brian McKeon was a serial molester. Under McGann, he was promoted to pastor of St. Anne's in Garden City. Under Murphy, he was bounced: Murphy took over in September 2001 and, in November, McKeon was gone.

No doubt McGann had his reasons for keeping such priests and it is not my intention to impugn his motives. It is my intention to say that whatever good reasons he had, he, like some other bishops, exercised flawed judgment in this regard.

To blame Murphy for any of this is irresponsible. If anything, he put in place a team of professionals led by an exemplary priest, Father Bob Batule, to deal squarely with this issue.

Finally, it is not the bishops of New York who are holding up a mandatory reporting law in New York State—it is Family Planning Advocates (the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood) and the New York Civil Liberties Union. They are opposed to blanketing everyone because they are interested in shielding abortion providers from reporting cases of statutory rape. Would that Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota would get on board with the bishops in insisting that there be no exemptions; instead, he wants the law to apply only to the clergy.

There are lots of reasons to be angry but no amount of it justifies trashing the innocent. The evidence shows that almost all priests have had absolutely nothing to do with the scandal; it also shows that Murphy's role on Long Island has been to tackle what he inherited.

In short, before anyone further hyperventilates over the

“crisis,” let’s not forget that most of our priests are good men and that Long Island’s bishop is doing what he can to move forward.

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Editor’s note: The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Manhattan

The American Conservative

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Drawing Distinctions

Jeremy Lott (Feb. 10) claims that the Catholic League uses the same tactics as CAIR. That may be true in some instances but the examples he cited are poor. The Catholic League does not issue “frequent alerts to elicit comments and money from supporters.” Six times a year we ask our members for a donation to pay for a specific project.

Do we “demonize” our opponents? We fight back against those who bash the Church, but it is not easy to see how this amounts to “demonizing.” Regarding the charge of our “slipshod use of polling,” we don’t poll. Finally, do we “elevate small tiffs into a national outrage”? That’s quite subjective: when we got “Opie and Anthony” fired for broadcasting a description of a couple having sex in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, we weren’t elevating anything—we were simply responding to an outrageous condition.

In short, it is tricky business to lump all anti-defamation organizations together.

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Reason

March 2003

E Pluribus Umbrage

Tim Cavanaugh, author of "E Pluribus Umbrage" (December), finds it amusing that in the midst of the church's priest scandal, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights "alerted its 300,000 members to a grave threat to the faith: a King of the Hill episode in which cartoon housewife Peggy impersonates a nun."

This makes it sound as if we object to Sister Act portrayals, but anyone who has really followed the Catholic League knows this is bunk. Our objection to this episode was the vile way in which the Eucharist was treated. Cavanaugh omits this because it would interfere with the point he wants to make.

On a more important note, Cavanaugh says that our petition to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) protesting Opie and Anthony shows we really do believe in censorship. This is nonsense. Congress long ago established the FCC, and no one has ever ruled it to be a censorial body. Indeed, when we succeeded in getting the show kicked off the air, we immediately requested the FCC not to go through with yanking the license of the station.

Perhaps the most telling comment by Cavanaugh is his remark that "the most endearing thing about Bill Donohue is that he genuinely seems to enjoy hurting people." It would be more accurate to say I enjoy giving it to intellectual jackasses. Cavanaugh will escape my wrath because he is no intellectual.

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America

March 3, 2003

Accurate

The Rev. Andrew M. Greeley's conclusion that *The New York Times's* coverage of the sexual abuse scandal in the church constitutes "virulent anti-Catholicism" is irresponsible ("The *Times* and Sexual Abuse by Priests" 2/10). The *Times*, like most major newspapers that covered the scandal, never implied that most priests were predators. And this is especially true of Laurie Goodstein, whom Father Greeley attacks. Never have I found her to be anything but professional and accurate in her reporting.

It does no good to blame the messenger for bringing bad news.

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