

MUMMERS PARADE DROPS OFFENSIVE SKIT

The Mummers Parade on New Year's Day is a Philadelphia tradition. Because of poor weather, this year's parade was moved to January 4. What made it really unique, though, was the news that this year's march would include an anti-Catholic skit. But after much protest the offensive skit was dropped. Public complaints were made by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the Diocese of Camden (a south Jersey diocese close to the city) and the Catholic League.

This year's Mummers Parade was to include a "parody" of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. To be performed by the Slick Duck Comic Brigade, it was supposed to feature men dressed as priests and young men dressed as altar boys; cops were to be shown chasing after the priests. The parade, it should be noted, is funded by the City of Philadelphia.

The Catholic League took the position that the skit was really an attack on gay priests. This angered some of our critics who for political reasons would prefer not to make any connection between the sexual abuse scandal and homosexuality. "To mock gay priests in a major parade in a prominent city is disgraceful," commented William Donohue. "That the government is hosting this assault on homosexual priests is even worse," he added.

We did not find it persuasive to say, as the sponsor of the Slick Duck's entry announced, that "As far as the parade goes, nothing is irreverent." We pointed out that the Deputy Recreation Commissioner of the parade was on record saying that no "blackface" would be allowed to march. "That's because the City of Philadelphia is infinitely more interested in not offending the sensibilities of African Americans than it is gay priests," Donohue said. "In short," he opined, "the City

has drawn a line that racists may not cross, but anti-Catholic and anti-gay bigots are welcome to do so.”

In an interesting turn of events, WPHL, the station that was to televise the parade, announced in advance that it would not show this expression of Catholic bashing. The general manager of the station, Leslie Glenn, rightly dubbed this display “disgusting.”

The Catholic League publicly commended Ms. Glenn for making this call. But we respectfully disagreed with her judgment nonetheless: Channel 17, we urged, should air this display of bigotry and let all Philadelphians know what the Slick Ducks are made of and what both the Mummers and the City of Philadelphia are willing to tolerate. That way men and women of common decency would be able to confront the bigots in their midst.

In the end, the parade was performed without incident. The Slick Ducks said they were never really going to perform their spoof. Mayoral candidate Sam Katz had it just right when he declared: “It was a sick proposal and a sick joke. Was it really a joke or something they decided to bag when they got so much pressure?” The evidence suggests the latter interpretation is right and that is why we were delighted to add to the pressure.