

NEW JERSEY DISCRIMINATES CATHOLICS

TRANSIT AGAINST

Officials at New Jersey Transit denied a Catholic group the right to sing at a celebration of a new light rail system last Saturday while allowing a Gospel group the right to perform. Up until the day before the event, the Catholic group, the Park Performing Arts Center in Union City, was told that it could participate in the celebration. But then the head of the group, Father Kevin Ashe, was told on Friday that because of separation of church and state concerns, actors who perform the Passion Play at his Union City Center could not participate.

However, the Monumental Baptist Church of Jersey City was permitted to sing. A Transit spokeswoman, Penny Bassett Hackett, explained her agency's decision as follows: "Gospel music is widely accepted as a mainstream category of music in the music industry and by the public."

Catholic League president William Donohue expressed the league's position today:

"We are exploring all kinds of avenues to deal with this blatant double standard. The reasoning advanced—that gospel singers are mainstream and therefore they don't trigger church-state problems, but Catholic singers do—is so transparent as to be laughable. After all, what exactly is the source of gospel music if not the Gospel?

"Moreover, since when did singing songs—religious or secular—become anything other than a free speech issue? According to the perverse logic as entertained here, Catholic singers can't sing at state events but it would be perfectly legal for Marilyn Manson to belt out one of his satanic songs.

Is there any state office holder in New Jersey who wants to argue this in an election year?

“We will have a field day with this. After dealing with the political geniuses in Washington involved in the House Chaplain issue, we now have a chance to see how bright their state counterparts in New Jersey are. This is going to be fun.”