

PROGRESS ON ANTI-CATHOLIC ADS

The on-going struggle to protest the placement of anti-Catholic ads in major newspapers is working: we have successfully stopped dozens of these ads from reappearing. The latest to respect our message is the *Huntsville Times* of Huntsville, Alabama. The editor, Joe Distelheim, actually wrote an editorial on the subject explaining to readers why it was a mistake to have allowed the ad to run in the first place. The ads are placed by a splinter group of the Seventh-Day Adventists, Eternal Gospel Church, and usually go by the headline, "EARTH'S FINAL WARNING."

In the last issue of *Catalyst*, we mentioned that the *Fresno Bee* would consider an op-ed page article by Bob Lockwood that registered the league's misgivings. The impetus for this opportunity comes from Bishop John T. Steinbock of Fresno; it was his idea to get the newspaper to allow the other side to be heard. Bob's article did appear. Below is an excerpt of what he had to say:

"The language used in the Eternal Gospel Church advertisement didn't just cross the line of bigotry, it went around the track four or five times. The advertisement wasn't an argument in favor of celebrating the Sabbath on Saturday. It was a wide-ranging attack on Catholics and Catholicism, calling the faith false, its leadership corrupting the faithful, and portraying the very Church itself as a biblical whore equated with the anti-Christ. This was not disagreement. This was pure hate literature that utilized anti-Catholicism in its most traditional and vicious forms.

"That the *Fresno Bee* ran the advertisement in the first place was surprising. More surprising, when the newspaper was asked to reevaluate any future acceptance of this advertisement, the *Fresno Bee* chose to say that it would make no such reevaluation, citing this is a 'free speech' issue.

“This is not an issue of ‘free speech’ in any sense of its meaning in journalism. This was a commercial transaction between the *Fresno Bee* and the Eternal Gospel Church. It was a paid advertisement, not a news story, analysis, opinion piece or editorial. The *Fresno Bee* decided to accept money for an advertisement that dealt squarely and entirely in religious bigotry and published it within its pages.”

We are grateful that the *Fresno Bee* bowed to Bishop Steinbock’s request and ran Lockwood’s rejoinder. But we would be even happier to learn the newspaper will never again run such an ad.