

STAFFER FOR REP. CLEMENT DISHONORS POPE

B.J. Rudell, a staffer for Congressman Bob Clement of Nashville, Tennessee, has posted via e-mail and the Internet an offensive statement about the pope. In the December 19 edition of *The Hotline: Daily Briefing on American Politics*, Rudell submitted a list of the “‘Top Ten Surprising Confessions Made by the Pope.” Included in this “humorous” list were such comments as “Stopped sending alimony checks” and “Scratches himself during prayers.” The most offensive remark was listed by Rudell himself as # 1: “His imaginary friend is Jewish.”

When a staffer from the Catholic League contacted Rudell about this matter, he argued that this was a free speech issue. He also maintained that his statements were not offensive because they “passed his criteria.”

Catholic League president William Donohue saw it differently:

“B.J. Rudell believes that he has emptied the discussion of his statement on the pope by citing his First Amendment right to free speech. However, the Catholic League has free speech rights, too, and we choose to exercise that right by calling for his dismissal: we are demanding that Congressman Clement fire Mr. Rudell.

“To suggest that Pope John Paul II, who has done more to foster better relations between Catholics and Jews than virtually anyone alive, is somehow in need of imagining that he has a Jewish friend, is scurrilous. That this comment was made the week before Christmas shows a level of insensitivity to Catholics that makes Mr. Rudell unfit for public service. Even worse is his obstinacy when challenged.

“The Catholic League hopes that Congressman Clement has

stronger criteria for judging offensiveness than his staffer, B.J. Rudell. If so, we expect it won't be long before Mr. Rudell is given his walking papers."

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NEW REPUBLIC FANS FLAMES OF ANTI-CATHOLICISM

The cover article of the December 30th edition of the **New Republic** contains a piece by Jacob Heilbrunn that alleges there is a growing war between Catholic and Jewish conservatives. The article, "Neocon v. Theocon," maintains that Catholic intellectuals have alienated their Jewish neoconservative friends by pushing for a Thomistic understanding of American democracy. The piece is in large measure a response to a recently published symposium in **First Things**.

According to Heilbrunn, the "mostly Catholic intellectuals" who comprise the theocons "are attempting to construct a Christian theory of politics that directly threatens the entire neoconservative philosophy." He then adds that this venture is seen by some neocons (none is identified) as one which "directly threatens Jews." The public philosophy that is ascribed to Catholic writers is labeled "not so much anti-American as un-American."

Catholic League president William Donohue had this to say about the article:

“It is amazing that such a highly regarded publication as the **New Republic** would stoop to the level of Catholic baiting. Heilbrunn chooses a symposium in which three of the five contributors are non-Catholic (curiously, one of the wives is identified as a ‘staunch Catholic’; it is not mentioned that one of the Catholic men is married to a Jewish woman) to argue that these articles are symbolic of some nefarious Catholic theory. Moreover, the organ that published the symposium isn’t even Catholic, it’s an interdenominational journal.

“By charging that a few Catholic scholars like Father Richard John Neuhaus and Robert George are threatening Jews, or that their ideas are ‘un-American,’ is as untrue as it is unethical. Indeed, these two men have been leaders in fostering better relations between Catholics and Jews. What the **New Republic** is doing is promoting division among conservative intellectuals, not reporting on it. That it has chosen the club of anti-Catholicism to do so is reprehensible.

“There are millions of Americans of all faiths who believe that we have an imperial judiciary, and some of them fear that the courts are undermining the legitimacy of the political order. This conclusion is debatable, but it is no more grounded in Catholicism than it is Judaism. Worse, the attempt to brand it as un-American and Catholic-inspired has a familiar demagogic ring to it.

“The **New Republic** is not generally given to bigotry. It is hoped this incident does not signal a change from its past record of excellence.”

CHRISTMAS TV “HUMOR” SLAMS CATHOLICISM

Last Saturday, December 14, two shows were aired that treated with disrespect Jesus, Mary and Joseph and generally caricatured Catholic beliefs and traditions. *Saturday Night Live* and *Mad TV* were replete with comedic attempts that disparaged Catholicism.

In *Saturday Night Live*, Rosie O'Donnell and Penny Marshall were portrayed as buffoon nuns. The nun played by Marshall was shown drinking liquor from a flask, and in another skit O'Donnell was shown speaking derisively of a nativity scene. In yet another scene, a figure of Baby Jesus was thrown to the ground.

Mad TV also caricatured the nativity scene with derision. Jesus was made the butt of laughter and a woman who played Our Blessed Mother announced, “The Virgin has arrived.” Mary spoke caustically of the Three Wise Men because the “cheap bastards” didn't bring any gifts. A figure of Baby Jesus was thrown to the ground.

William Donohue of the Catholic League commented as follows:

“I know of no other religion which is treated with such utter disrespect on TV than Catholicism. *Saturday Night Live* and *Mad TV* are just the latest contributors to this effort. By choosing the Christmas season to slam Catholicism, the actors, writers, directors and producers of these programs show their hand as clear as day.

“That no figure of parallel significance to Jesus from any other religion is ever treated this way is revealing. It is not because the producers fear backlash from other religions, it is because such insult would offend their own moral code; it is a code which does not include respect for Catholics.

“It would be a worthwhile exercise for those in the entertainment industry to hold a symposium explaining to the public the source of their animus against Catholicism. But given the unethical treatment they accord Catholics, it is not likely they could do so without lying.”

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS SLIGHT CHRISTMAS

The Catholic League has been inundated with complaints across the country that public school teachers have been diluting the meaning of Christmas while simultaneously trumpeting the meaning of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. It has become commonplace for public schools to teach about Hanukkah but not about Christmas, to display menorahs but not nativity scenes, and to celebrate the meaning of Kwanzaa but not Christmas.

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, issued the following remarks on this subject today:

“In 1995, President Clinton sent a memo to Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Education Richard Riley outlining the religious liberty rights of students in public schools. As he said, ‘nothing in the First Amendment converts our public schools into religion-free zones or requires all religious expression to be left behind at the schoolhouse door.’

“President Clinton was explicit about this matter: it is legal for teachers to teach about religion, for students to express

their religious beliefs in their assignments, for students to distribute religious literature and to wear religious garb. Yet these rights are still being summarily ignored in certain school districts.

“In addition, it is now common practice for schools to display menorahs but not nativity scenes. Instead, the Christmas tree, which is not a religious symbol, is being displayed as though it were one. It must also be said that the sensitivity that many school districts are showing for Kwanzaa, which was literally invented in 1966, is in stark contrast to the way in which Christmas is being celebrated.

“While it is true that there is no law that requires public schools to display nativity scenes or teach about Christmas, it is also true that there is no law that prohibits them from doing so. In the interest of fairness, then, it behooves school authorities to accommodate Christian students as much as they do Jewish and African-American students. That is why the Catholic League will continue to press for equitable treatment.”

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RALPH REED ENDORSES CATHOLIC BAITING BOOK

Ralph Reed, the executive director of the Christian Coalition, has endorsed a recently released book by John Wheeler, Jr., *Earth's Two-Minute Warning*, that contains passages that disparage Catholicism; Wheeler was the editor of all Christian

Coalition publications for five years.

Wheeler's book, published by The Leader Company, offers a possible scenario of the end of time. Imbued with a frenzied millennium spirit, Wheeler writes that "The identification of the Pope with the Antichrist has been a recurring theme for Protestants since the Reformation."

As for Wheeler himself, he says, "Certainly there are many sincere and genuine Christians within the Roman Catholic ranks—although some Catholic doctrines clearly are irreconcilable with Biblical truth—and it would be grossly wrong to mislabel all Catholics as willful followers of the Antichrist." Which is also to say that it is not wrong to label many Catholics this way.

Wheeler also warns that "there is some legitimate cause for concern that the Vatican may one day run amok," suggesting that the Pope as Antichrist may be at hand. Indeed, he argues that "This Antichrist's ascendancy will be promoted by a blessing from a corrupt Pope—an apostate, Satanically empowered successor to John Paul II."

Ralph Reed is quoted as saying that this book "is a compelling look at the controversial subject of the end times ... an important contribution to this vital discussion."

Catholic League president William Donohue offered the following comment:

"Earth's Two-Minute Warning shows the darker side of Protestantism. A polemic representative of a medieval mind, Wheeler seeks justification for his cause by repeating old canards about Catholicism. The apocalyptic impulse that drives this book appeals to prurient and insecure needs. By advancing the premise that the Catholic Church is the Antichrist, Wheeler resurrects a legacy that deserves to be buried once and for all.

“While it would be unfair to hold Reed responsible for everything Wheeler has written in this book, it is distressing to learn that he has leant his name to this sensationalism. Reed owes Catholics an explanation for his endorsement.”

CHICAGO PROPOSES TO DELETE GOOD FRIDAY AS HOLIDAY

The city of Chicago is proposing that Good Friday be eliminated as a government holiday; a final vote will take place soon in the City Council. The move is unprecedented as Good Friday has always been given as a government holiday in Chicago. The official reason given for the change is “the increasing diversity of religious viewpoints among our work force.”

Catholic League president William Donohue voiced his objections today:

“The proposal to change Good Friday to a business day for city workers in Chicago has nothing to do with any purported interest in respecting diversity. On the contrary, it has everything to do with bigotry. Respecting diversity means respecting the religious and cultural heritage of the various groups that comprise American society. The decision to delete Good Friday as a government holiday shows just the opposite—utter disrespect for the heritage of the majority of Americans.

“Just as everyone is not a Christian, everyone is also not an African American, yet that does not cause the high priests of multiculturalism to suggest that we eliminate Martin Luther King Day from holiday observances. In a time when holidays are

literally being invented, such as Kwanzaa and U.S.A. Muslims Day, it is unconscionable that days like Good Friday are being stricken.

“If Catholics and Protestants allow this decision in Chicago to go uncontested, they will have willingly acceded to the demands of extremists. It is time to rally the troops and use every political, legal and economic means available. The Catholic League is presently exploring tactics of its own.”

Chicago area media should contact Chicago League Chapter President Patrick Cremin for a statement. He can be reached at 312-595-3050 or 847-446-7846.

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS IN WORKPLACE LOOMS IN MASSACHUSETTS

A bill that would secure protection for workers who desire to observe religious holidays without penalty has passed the Senate in Massachusetts and has now passed muster with the Supreme Judicial Court. The legislation awaits passage in the House; Governor Weld has said that he will sign the bill.

In February 1995, the Catholic League submitted an amicus brief in the case of *Pielech and Reed v. Massasoit Greyhound, Inc.* It did so because Kathleen Pielech and Patricia Reed were fired from their job at Raynham-Paunton Greyhound Park when they failed to show for work on Christmas day, 1992.

When the case was brought before the Supreme Judicial Court in 1995, it struck down the existing law that protected religious rights in the workplace as unconstitutional. But when a new law was passed extending religious rights to those not

affiliated with an organized church or sect (a sincerely held belief was sufficient to grant protection), the Supreme Judicial Court, on November 27, 1996, upheld that law's constitutionality.

Catholic League president William Donohue phrased the league's position as follows:

"What happened to Kathleen Pielech and Patricia Reed was an outrage. Religious liberty means precious little if those who seek to exercise it are penalized for doing so. Holy days, in any world religion, are meant to be observed by the faithful, and this is not possible if workers are punished for doing so.

"It is regrettable that the previous law, which existed in Massachusetts for 23 years, was not held constitutional in the first place. There is a danger that the new law could be exploited by those not genuinely affiliated with any socially recognized religion, but that risk is worth taking if it means that most workers in Massachusetts will again be able to celebrate their religious holidays without fear of reprisal.

"Over the past few months, the Catholic League has contacted the Massachusetts Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, House Speaker and Senate President urging them to restore religious liberty in the workplace. We are pleased with their response and await speedy justice in the House."

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