

VICTORY IN VACCO v. QUILL

Today's ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Vacco v. Quill* upheld the laws in New York and Washington state that make it illegal for doctors to assist in the suicide of their patients. The decision said that "the New York statutes outlawing assisted suicide neither infringe fundamental rights nor involve suspect classifications." The court added that "The distinction between letting a patient die and making that patient die is important, logical, rational, and well established."

Just as important, the high court reaffirmed the reasoning of the New York law when it emphasized the necessity of "maintaining [the] physicians' role as their patients' healers; it also said that the New York law protected "vulnerable people from indifference, prejudice, and psychological and financial pressure to end their lives."

Catholic League president William Donohue offered the following comment on this historic decision today:

"The Supreme Court acted with great jurisprudential wisdom in upholding laws that prohibit doctor-assisted death. It fully recognizes the clear line that exists between allowing a patient to die and forcing a patient to die. It also affirms the status of physician as life-saver, not as life-taker. Regrettably, the high court does not apply this logic to abortion, for if it did, it could not argue that doctors who help to kill unborn babies are somehow flexing their constitutional muscles.

"Those who were most opposed to doctor-assisted death, namely the undereducated, the elderly, minorities, the handicapped and the poor, are the biggest beneficiaries of this decision. The only losers are those who interpret liberty as including the right of doctors to kill their patients and those who see

the most vulnerable segments of our society as little more than human rubbish.”

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY WILL SURVIVE COURT DECISION

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *City of Boerne v. Flores, Archbishop of San Antonio* declared as unconstitutional the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The 1993 law said that any law that imposed a “substantial burden” on someone’s religious beliefs must serve a “compelling” government interest. When tested in *Boerne*, a case that involved the right of a Catholic parish to reconstruct its church—over the objections of town officials who held the church to be a landmark—the Religious Freedom Restoration Act did not pass constitutional muster with the court.

William Donohue explained the league’s position on this decision:

“The league greets the decision in *Boerne* with mixed emotions. On the one hand, it regrets what could be interpreted as a retreat from the insularity that religion has enjoyed vis-à-vis government over the past few years. On the other hand, the league feels comfortable knowing that by striking down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the high court made no attempt to attenuate this nation’s commitment to religious liberty.

“It also needs to be said that while the Religious Freedom Restoration Act did offer some new needed protection for religious liberty, it did so while expanding the authority of Congress to determine issues that are properly the province of

the judiciary. That is not something that students of the constitution can take lightly.

“Therefore, on balance, the Catholic League finds the ruling in *Boerne* acceptable. Moreover, the league believes that the preferred position that religious liberty has enjoyed in this country will prevail. And the Catholic League will be prepared to fight those who may seek to exploit today’s ruling as a mechanism to privatize religion.”

AID TO CHURCH SCHOOLS MAKES SENSE

Yesterday’s decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Agostini v. Felton*, overturned previous high court decisions that prohibited public school teachers from offering remedial work to nonpublic school students who attended “pervasively sectarian” schools. The Catholic League filed an amicus brief in *Agostini* supporting the restoration of this previously non-controversial practice.

William Donohue commented on this victory today:

“The Supreme Court’s decision in *Agostini* made good constitutional and educational sense. Constitutionally, the ruling jettisons the argument that the mere presence of a public school teacher in a parochial school mysteriously imbues her with religious fervor. As the court said yesterday, ‘there is no reason to presume that, simply because she enters a parochial school classroom [that she] will depart from her assigned duties and instructions and embark on religious indoctrination.’ And that is why not even one teacher, in the 20 years that such programs were available, ever complained

about religious indoctrination.

“The decision also brings sanity to the educational process. No more will parochial school students who qualify for remedial work be segregated in vans parked across the street from their school. The signal that such an odious practice sent was psychologically and pedagogically debased and sent an unmistakable message of second-class status to Catholic schoolchildren.”

HATE ARTISTS HIT NEW YORK AREA ON SUNDAY

The two most notorious hate artists in the music business, Marilyn Manson and Sinéad O'Connor, will appear this Sunday at Giants Stadium and Randall's Island, respectively. Manson is featured in the "OzzFest '97" concert and O'Connor is part of the American Guinness Festival.

Manson is best known for his music that glorifies evil. A member of the Church of Satan, he has publicly identified himself with Lucifer. While performing, Manson often rips up Bibles, appeals to the crowd to become "an unholy missionary for AntiChrist Superstar" and beckons his fans to worship the Manson "family." He sells T-shirts that read "Kill Your Parents" and sings songs that celebrate violence, most of which are replete with obscenities.

In 1992, O'Connor tore up a picture of the pope on TV, shouting, "Fight the real enemy." More recently, she has said that "If the Virgin Mary were here today she'd be ripping pictures of the pope." Her interest in the Virgin Mary has led her to be cast as the Mother of Jesus in the movie, The

Butcher Boy, uttering profanities in her role.

League president William Donohue outlined the organization's objections:

"Sinead O'Connor and Marilyn Manson epitomize the most debased elements in our culture. There is more at work here than youthful rebellion: anyone who celebrates blasphemy, obscenity and violence contributes to a milieu that claims the hearts, minds and souls of our youth. Moreover, those who justify these sick antics in the name of 'making a living' or 'art' are just as depraved as the performers.

"The Catholic League has asked Liam Lynch, who heads the American Guinness Festival, to press O'Connor to make an apology to Catholics. But that is no more likely to happen than it is to learn that Manson will conduct himself with a modicum of civility. The most responsible message that fathers can send on Father's Day is to dissuade their children from attending either concert."

CATHOLIC LEAGUE ANNOUNCES WEB SITE

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is proud to announce the launching of its web site (www.catholicleague.org).

Eileen Sepp, the league's Director of Media Technology, has constructed a web site that has an extensive list of Catholic League resources. Browsers can find selections from the

current issue of *Catalyst*, the league's journal, as well as the complete text of previous issues for 1997. The league's Annual Report on Anti-Catholicism (1994-1996) is also available. Current news includes a copy of all recent news releases issued by the league.

There is an opportunity for new members to join the league and there is a list of books and videos that may be purchased. Also available is a feedback section which allows interested parties to report incidents of anti-Catholicism.

The Catholic League is providing a web site that will be continually updated, thus giving users a reason to return to it over and over again. It is our hope that reporters and researchers will find the league's web site to be a valuable source of information on the nature and prevalence of anti-Catholicism.