

ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIAS FUELS ANTI-VOUCHER RULING

One day before the start of the school year, a federal judge has issued an injunction blocking Cleveland's four year-old voucher program, and virtually promising to kill it altogether.

Judge Solomon Oliver Jr. declared that since the vast majority of parents in the program are choosing religious schools, "the Cleveland program has the primary effect of advancing religion." As such, he declared, there is "no substantial possibility" that he will ultimately allow the voucher program to continue.

His ruling not only promises massive disruption for almost 4,000 students participating in the voucher program; it also exposes the anti-religious bias inherent in his opposition to school choice.

Catholic League president William Donohue explained:

"The Cleveland program has the primary effect of advancing, not religion, but parental choice. Judge Oliver does not like the choices that parents are making; so in a shocking display of judicial arrogance, he is simply overruling their decisions about the education of their children.

"The judge makes clear that if parents were choosing non-sectarian, rather than religious, private schools, he would have no problem with the program. This smacks of an anti-religious bias that clearly compromises his ability to rule objectively on this issue.

"As an Air Force veteran, I benefited from the GI Bill, which allowed us to attend any college—public, non-sectarian private, or religious—with government assistance. Why should

not parents—the primary educators of their children—have the same choice?

“The United States Supreme Court should recognize the anti-religious bias inherent in Judge Oliver’s ruling and overturn it on appeal.”

SCHOOL BOARD REVERSES BAN ON STAR OF DAVID

The Star of David is no longer banned in Harrison County, Mississippi schools.

Overturing its August 16 ruling, the Harrison County School Board has voted unanimously to lift the ban, which had been instituted because the Jewish religious symbol bears a resemblance to a six-pointed star being worn by some gang members.

Catholic League president William Donohue welcomed the board’s latest action:

“The Harrison County School Board was right to acknowledge its mistake and to act so swiftly to rectify it. Its initial decision would have been counter-productive. Barring religious expression by students is no way to reduce the incidence of violence in schools.

“The members of the Harrison County School Board have acted responsibly. We commend them.”

SCHOOL BOARD BAN ON STAR OF DAVID WILL FAIL

Citing concerns over gangs who wear six-pointed stars, a Mississippi school board has announced that the Star of David is now banned from school property. Harrison County school Superintendent Henry Arledge justified the board decision by saying it was done to protect the welfare of the students.

The school board considered banning crosses but decided not to do so. The American Civil Liberties Union is scheduled to file suit in U.S. District Court today representing a Jewish student who was ordered to remove the Jewish symbol.

The Catholic League's position was spelled out by its president, William Donohue:

"Ridding the schools of violence is a must, but it cannot be done by sacrificing religious liberties in the process. The decision by the Harrison County school board was at the very least ignoble and at the worst anti-Semitic. Either way, the Catholic League sees a vital religious liberty at stake and will file an amicus brief against the school board, presuming the case moves beyond the District level.

"This has to be one of the dumbest decisions we've heard about coming from a school board, and we've heard of plenty."

RIZZOLI BOOKSTORE PROFILES OFFENSIVE ART

On August 17, a branch of the international bookstore, Rizzoli, placed in its storefront window a picture of blasphemous art that was offensive to Christians. The branch at 31 West 57th Street in New York had on window display a picture of the Last Supper that showed a bare-breasted woman standing in the middle of the table with her arms outstretched; men and women were seated on both sides of her conversing. The picture was taken from a book entitled *Visionaire 28*, published by Visionaire.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to the store's manager, John Deen, to say that he thought it an impropriety for a prestigious bookstore in mid-town Manhattan to give such high profile to a display that many Catholics might find offensive. When Deen said he did not think the picture was offensive, Donohue asked him whether he might think it offensive to picture Martin Luther King with a swastika on his forehead surrounded by a bare-breasted woman. Deen said that he would.

Donohue does not want the book removed from the store, but he has asked that such offensive pictures not be placed in the storefront window. When Deen said that other pictures in the book might be put in the window, a copy of the book was purchased for \$150. The book is a collection of contemporary portraits based on the Bible and most of them are non-offensive. But in addition to the "Last Supper," the following portraits appear: a) the "Virgin Mary" is a veiled woman with her breasts partially exposed wearing pink panties b) "Salome and John the Baptist" (a contribution by "Piss Christ" artist Andres Serrano) features a young blond with hooks as nails wearing red fishnet stockings squatted, with legs spread, in front of the bloody head of John the Baptist c) "Judas' Kiss"

is a homoerotic picture of a man kissing a boy.

Donohue said that "The editors are irresponsible, the contributors are rip-off artists and Rizzoli is just plain dumb: we will feature all this in our 1999 Annual Report on Anti-Catholicism."

VIRGINIA NAVAL BASE VIOLATES RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION

Captain R.W. Jerome, Commander of Naval Security Group Northwest, has determined that area civilian Catholics, located in Chesapeake, Virginia, can no longer have access to the Northwest Chapel that lies just outside the base; this reverses a decision of more than two decades that accommodated these Catholics. This is not a decision that the Catholic League is protesting, though many others, including both Virginia Senators, are.

What the Catholic League is protesting, however, is the barring of the Knights of Columbus from using this chapel. Commander Jerome says that the Knights (along with a Methodist Men's group and the Boy Scouts) are guilty of discriminating against women and thus cannot use the chapel.

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

"We have written to Commander Jerome and to Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig expressing our willingness to sue the Navy in the event the Knights of Columbus decides to do so. The operative directive from the Department of Defense bars 'unlawful discrimination,' making plain its willingness to

countenance reasonably-grounded distinctions (by way of analogy, the Fourth Amendment bars searches and seizures that are 'unreasonable,' thus allowing for reasonable ones). Moreover, the right of private voluntary groups to determine their own membership strictures is a right that the courts have always protected.

"At stake is freedom of association, a First Amendment right that the federal courts upheld in the case of the Ancient Order of Hibernians against gay activists: in that case, homosexuals sought to have their own marching unit in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. We expect that if this case reaches the high court, it will also sustain this constitutional right. In the meantime, we will conduct a public relations campaign against the U.S. Navy."

NEVILLE PUBLIC MUSEUM OFFENDS CATHOLICS

On July 2, the Neville Public Museum in Green Bay, Wisconsin, began displaying an art exhibit of paintings and sculpture by Norbert Kox entitled, "To Hell and Back." It features the following: a) the Virgin Mary depicted as the "Great Harlot" b) Christ labeled the "Son of Perdition" c) God the Father represented as a monster d) Our Lady of Guadalupe with cross-shaped knife, cutting the heart of a baby e) Christ wearing a necklace with the Satanic symbol "666" f) A headless statue of Mary with black filth running out of her Immaculate Heart g) A rewritten, blasphemous version of "Our Father." In addition, there is blasphemous misuse of Catholic sacramentals, such as rosary beads, medals, crucifixes, scapulars and votive candles. The exhibit is scheduled to run through October 10.

On July 27, Catholic League president William Donohue sent a letter to Frederick K. Baer, Chairman of the Neville Public Museum's Board of Directors, and all the members of the board, requesting that a resolution be passed that would "formally express its misgivings about this exhibit." Donohue added that "there is no other way in which Catholic sensibilities, already damaged, can be mollified."

Donohue commented on this issue today:

"Two weeks have passed since we sent a letter—overnight express—to the board of directors of the Neville Public Museum stating our concerns. There has been no reply.

"We never asked for the art to be censored in any way. All we asked for was some reassurance from the board that it did not personally condone anti-Catholic bigotry. That such reassurance has not been forthcoming speaks loudly and clearly about the board's sense of fairness. Accordingly, we will now contact the officials of Brown County, who run and fund the museum, to consider defunding the establishment; we will also take our case to appropriate state officials."

“DETROIT ROCK CITY” IS A LOW-CLASS ACT

On August 13, New Line Cinema is releasing "Detroit Rock City," a movie set in 1978 about four teenagers who go on a wild spree on their way to a KISS concert. KISS star Gene Simmons is featured in the movie and is a co-producer. It is a farcical comedy in which nearly all the characters are caricatures. It is also one that contains two scenes that are explicitly designed to offend Catholics. Catholic League

research analyst Tamara Collins offered the following account:

In the first offensive segment, viewers meet a drunken, foul-mouthed priest who steals money from the collection box to pay for pizza. In the second offensive segment, we meet a Catholic woman who is portrayed as a fanatic because she carries her rosary beads with her and has a bumper sticker that says, "Smile, Jesus Loves You." Coarse and hypocritical, she drags her son to confession when she discovers his interest in attending a KISS concert.

The priest, who is the subject of an advance by the boy's mother, asks the boy in the confessional whether he doesn't have something to confess like "carnal knowledge with a neighborhood girl" or "finding a box of magazines under Dad's bed." When the priest exits the confessional, the boy is joined by one of his girlfriends and quickly loses his virginity there. When the priest returns, he asks the boy about "crotchless panties," etc.

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, offered these remarks:

"It's always the Catholic religion that today's 'humorists' in Hollywood target. That's because they like us so much.

"The interplay between sex and religion has long made for good copy, and in the right hands, it can prove to be fascinating. In the hands of charlatans, it doesn't work. That Gene Simmons fits the latter category will be argued by no one. 'Detroit Rock City' is a low-class act that is consistent with the work of Mr. Simmons."

AIR FORCE'S BID TO APPEASE LT. BERRY FAILS

Yesterday, the Catholic League sponsored a press conference in Washington on the injustice that the Air Force is doing to Lt. Ryan Berry, the serviceman who is requesting a religious exemption from serving with females in an underground missile silo; the Air Force is penalizing Lt. Berry for not serving in this specific capacity.

Just prior to the press conference, Congressman Roscoe G. Bartlett, who is supporting the officer, received a letter dated August 3 from General Michael Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff. "I fully agree that the United States Air Force must accommodate religious beliefs to the maximum extent possible," wrote Gen. Ryan. Regarding Lt. Berry, Gen. Ryan said that the young Catholic officer "will soon be scheduled for training to a new career field followed by an assignment to another installation."

William Donohue, who spoke to this issue in Washington yesterday, offered the following comments on this latest development:

"Lt. Berry's attorney, Henry Hamilton, labeled Gen. Ryan's overture 'vapid,' and I would certainly agree with that assessment. The only thing that really matters is whether the politically-driven negative evaluation of Lt. Berry—which followed two glowing accounts of his performance—will remain unamended. If it does, it effectively kills Lt. Berry's career.

"The Catholic League will conduct a media campaign against the U.S. Air Force for its actions. In addition, in the next issue of our monthly journal, Catalyst, we will ask our members to contact Gen. Ryan and their congressman about this issue.

“As I said yesterday, it is perverse that the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces can have oral sex in the Oval Office of the White House—and do so with impunity—while Lt. Berry is punished for wanting to avoid the very occasion of sin that disgraced President Clinton.”

CAPITOL HILL PRESS CONFERENCE ON LT. BERRY

On Wednesday, August 4, the Catholic League will sponsor a press conference in Washington, D.C. regarding the case of Lt. Ryan Berry. Lt. Berry is requesting that the Air Force accommodate his religious liberty objections to being forced to work with women in an underground silo; the close quarters that this duty entails, Lt. Berry insists, would create an occasion of sin. The officer does not object to women in the military, and simply wants the Air Force to provide for an exemption from this specific duty, the way it did for a year-and-a-half before it reversed its position.

The press conference will take place at the House Office Triangle on Capitol Hill at 1:00 p.m. Attending will be Lt. Ryan Berry, his wife and daughter, Berry’s attorney, Henry Hamilton, Congressman Roscoe G. Bartlett of Maryland, and Catholic League president William Donohue. Lt. Berry is being supported in his effort by Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A., John Cardinal O’Connor, Archbishop of New York, and others.

BOOKLET ON “DOGMA” RELEASED

Today, the Catholic League is releasing a booklet on the movie “Dogma” that offers proof of the anti-Catholic nature of the film. The booklet reprints comments about the movie that have been made by “Dogma” director Kevin Smith, the movie’s actors, film critics and others.

The Catholic League is in possession of the film’s script, but it prefers to convince the public of the Catholic-bashing elements in the movie by simply quoting what those involved in the movie have said about it; the remarks by critics who liked “Dogma” also proved to be revealing. The movie is expected to be released in October, though Bob and Harvey Weinstein have yet to find a distributor.

The booklet is being distributed to the media, the Catholic League’s board of directors, board of advisors and chapter presidents, selected members, all the bishops and others. Anyone who would like a copy should contact the Catholic League.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented on the booklet today:

“We have the script and, more important, we have the statements of ‘Dogma’s’ fans. Quite naturally, the actors and film critics who like the movie are not disturbed by the anti-Catholicism that they themselves acknowledge, however unwittingly. Indeed, it would be hard to think of a movie that was so anti-Catholic that this gang would label it as such. Be that as it may, there’s nothing like getting it from the horse’s mouth, and this is what the ‘Dogma’ booklet does: it literally settles the issue.

“On July 23, Howard Stern discussed the movie with its writer/director Kevin Smith. ‘It’s got some Jesus Christ thing in it so all the religious folks are already hating it,’ said

Stern. Smith's reply was excellent: 'Then we must be doing something right.' Thanks, Kev, that ends the debate."