

DEBATE OVER SCHOOL VOUCHERS GETS UGLY IN MILWAUKEE

Last week, in the debate over school vouchers in Milwaukee, the Wisconsin state legislature considered an amendment to a school-choice bill that would require background checks of voucher-school employees. State Senator Gwendolynne Moore, who pushed for the measure, said she wanted to vest this authority in the Milwaukee Department of Public Instruction. The Milwaukee Archdiocese already conducts background checks, but this was not deemed sufficient by Moore.

State Senator Moore did not confine her remarks to the issue at hand. Instead, she repeatedly cited the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. Those who objected to her amendment were accused of protecting “rapists.” Worse, she said the voucher schools would become a magnet for pedophile priests. She even opined that because private (non-Catholic) schools are not required to conduct background checks, predatory men who were thinking about entering a seminary might elect instead to teach in one of these schools.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

“Time and again we have seen that some opponents of school choice find it difficult to stay focused on the issue—they simply can’t resist taking a sucker punch against the Catholic Church. Before the scandal, they would argue that the Church was simply motivated by greed in advocating voucher programs. Now they maintain that opportunities to prey on the young are at work. And in the fertile imagination of State Senator Gwen Moore, Catholic men who think they have a vocation may decide to follow their real vocation in life—to molest kids—by signing up to teach in a private, non-parochial, school.

“It is not enough for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* to write an exemplary editorial denouncing Moore for her remarks. I am writing to State Senator Jon Erpenbach, the leader of the Senate Democrats in the Wisconsin legislature, asking him to personally intervene in this matter by getting Senator Moore to apologize to area Catholics.”

MEDIA TREAT POPE FAIRLY (FOR THE MOST PART)

Over the past week, the Catholic League has been carefully monitoring media coverage of Pope John Paul II's Silver Jubilee. Catholic League president William Donohue summarized the league's observations today:

“Most of the print and electronic media did a very fair job covering the events surrounding the Silver Jubilee of Pope John Paul II. As expected, commentary on the pope's tenure, whether expressed as an editorial or by a columnist, tended to be more critical. But criticism of the pope, or of any Catholic teaching or tradition, is not synonymous with bigotry. Indeed, the charge of anti-Catholicism loses force when promiscuously distributed: it should be reserved for instances when criticism spills over into disdain, disparagement and insult. Take, for example, the article in today's *Los Angeles Times* by Daniel C. Maguire, professor of moral theology at Marquette University. Here is a sample of his vitriol:

- The pope has “squandered his moral authority on issues in which he has no privileged expertise.”
- The pope has “silenced the voices of many Catholic

theologians and arrogantly asserted his own unique teaching prerogatives in ways that cut the legs out from any true ecumenism.”

- “Two areas especially signaled his inadequacy as a moral world leader: his demeaning view of half the human race—women—and his obsessive concern with what can be called pelvic orthodoxy.”
- The reason why Mother Teresa is being elevated to sainthood is because she “was a firm defender of male dominance.”
- The Vatican holds an “unduly privileged perch” at the U.N., “even though it strains credulity to ponder how 110 acres with no women and children could be considered a ‘nation.’”
- Vatican opposition to condoms is “murderous.”
- It smacks of a “naïve mythology” to see the pope as “almost single-handedly bringing down Soviet communism.”

“This is the voice of an embittered ex-priest, now in his seventies, in search of an audience. We just gave him one.”

JUDGING THE POPE BY THE POLLS

On the day Pope John Paul II celebrates his Silver Jubilee, the results of two new polls on his performance have been released. For the purpose of simplicity, the first poll will be called the USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup poll; the second will be named the Washington Post-ABC poll. Catholic League president William Donohue offered his analysis today:

“Fifty-three percent of Catholics in the first poll, and 62 percent of those in the second poll, say the pope is ‘out of touch’ with the views of American Catholics. Yet 63 percent

in the first poll, and 80 percent in the second, approve of his leadership. Indeed, almost 90 percent of Catholics in the second poll (the first did not ask this question) give the pope high marks for 'preserving the church's traditions.' What gives?

"It is too easy to say that Catholics like the pope personally but don't like some of his teachings. To begin with, there is a strong correlation between Catholics who attend Mass on a regular basis and support for the Church's teachings. The obverse being true as well, it means little to factor non-practicing Catholics into any survey of Catholics (vegetarians who eat hot dogs at baseball games do not provide insight into the sentiments of vegetarians).

"So what gives? Many Catholics are somewhat conflicted: they admire the pope for being the steady moral anchor that he is while continuing to express some of the more secular values of the dominant culture. What seems not to be understood is that if the pope sought to bring the Church's teachings more into line with the values of the dominant culture, he would lose the respect of the very same people who voice a desire for change. People respect leaders for doing what is right—not for appeasing their preferences.

"Furthermore, to suggest—as some aging dissidents have—that most practicing Catholics are up in arms over the absence of certain reforms is not only absurd (Catholics can leave and join any number of religions that have succumbed to the culture), it suggests a reluctance to credit them with good judgment for approving the pope's performance."

BOSTON ELITES SEEK TO POLICE CATHOLIC CHURCH

A group of elites in the fields of law, psychology and social work has petitioned the Archdiocese of Boston for permission to oversee cases of alleged clergy sexual abuse. They have been denied. That is because the archdiocese already has two groups of Catholics who are discharged with this duty. Nonetheless, the elites object to this archdiocesan prerogative. Moreover, the critics are unhappy with the rule that members must be in “full communion” with the Church.

Catholic League president William Donohue addressed this issue today:

“This is only the latest example of elites who are exploiting the homosexual scandal in the Catholic Church to service their own agendas (95 percent of the cases of priestly sexual abuse in Boston are male-on-male sex—see the *Boston Globe*, February 7, 2003). On the one hand, the elites commend Archbishop Sean O’Malley for his good work; on the other hand, they insist he must anoint them if he is to succeed.

“It is striking that the very people who gave the bishops lousy advice in the first place—namely shrinks who thought they could ‘cure’ homosexual molesters—are leading the charge to stick their nose into the internal affairs of the Catholic Church. If they are truly interested in protecting young people from molesters, they should immediately investigate public school employees and abortion providers: 15 percent of public school kids are molested, and Planned Parenthood staffers can provide leads on statutory rape that are indispensable.

“The elites bared their hand when they objected to the rule that Catholics must be in ‘full communion’ with the Church as

a condition of serving on the review boards. While their idea of what constitutes a good Catholic has been corrupted by simply living in Massachusetts, it is no excuse for trampling on the First Amendment. Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly, who is leading this crusade, obviously has no respect for separation of church and state. But two can play the same game: I am writing him today asking his permission for the Catholic League to police the internal affairs of his office. We offer our services pro bono."

WASHBURN UNIVERSITY SANCTIONS CATHOLIC BASHING

A controversial sculpture that depicts a Catholic bishop wearing a hat that resembles a phallic symbol has been chosen for display by some faculty members and students at Washburn University. The exhibit also bears an offensive inscription mocking the confessional.

Printed below is Catholic League president Dr. William A. Donohue's letter to Washburn University president Dr. Jerry B. Farley:

On March 14, 1998, you were cited in the Topeka Capital-Journal as approving the unanimous decision of the student-faculty board that reprimanded Ryan Steiner for insulting some students. Steiner, then editor of the Washburn student newspaper, made disparaging remarks about nontraditional students and called another student a "wack-o" and a "loser." You were quoted as branding Steiner's remarks "insensitive," and that is why you approved the resolution that accused him of engaging in "unethical and unprofessional conduct."

As someone who spent 20 years teaching—16 of them in higher education—I believe it took great courage on your part to denounce Steiner’s behavior. But I am perplexed as to why you have suddenly turned on a dime when it comes to anti-Catholicism: the official position of the university towards the offensive exhibit by Jerry Boyle, “Holier Than Thou,” is without condemnation. Yet it was professors and students on the Washburn Campus Beautification Committee who chose to insult Catholics by selecting the Boyle sculpture for campus display.

Any fair-minded observer would conclude that Steiner’s offense pales next to the Beautification Committee’s decision to honor Boyle. So please explain to me why Steiner’s foray in bad taste resulted in his being placed on probation—with the explicit threat of dismissal hanging over his head—while those who sanction Catholic bashing are treated as mere agents of free speech?

“The letter was faxed and mailed today. We await Dr. Farley’s reply.”