

FLORIDA SENATE WEIGHS CHRISTIAN LICENSE PLATES

Last week we criticized the Florida ACLU for opposing an “I Believe” Christian specialty license plate; those who want this plate would have to pay an additional fee. We subsequently contacted the Florida House urging members to adopt the plate. Now we are contacting the Senate: Sen. Minority Leader Steve Geller is leading the opposition to an amended bill by Sen. Ronda Storms.

Commenting on this development is Catholic League president Bill Donohue:

“It is not clear why Sen. Geller is opposing this specialty license plate, but it is not a stretch to say that he probably agrees with the position of Florida ACLU executive director Howard Simon. Simon argues that the license plate ‘sends a message that Florida is essentially a Christian state.’ If this is also Geller’s position, then what is needed is an ‘I Believe’ license plate adorned by a Star of David for Jews and a Crescent and Star for Muslims.

“To be against this proposal would invite serious questions. Why would Geller, a Democrat, want to put his fellow Democrats in the position of denying the public expression of religion? After all, for the last four years we have heard legions of Democrats loudly protest the notion that the Republicans own God. They are right to protest, but it remains true that voters want to know which party is truly religion friendly. And given that this is an election year, and the fate of the Florida Democratic primary has yet to be decided, why would any Florida Democrat want to play to the stereotype that the Democrats are not religion friendly?

“As pointed out last week, this is not a church and state

issue—it is a choice issue. There will be more than Floridians watching this outcome.”

Contact our ally, Sen. Storms at storms.ronda.web@flsenate.gov
Also contact Sen. Geller at geller.steven.web@flsenate.gov

ACLU OPPOSES CHRISTIAN LICENSE PLATES

Florida lawmakers are now debating whether to adopt a specialty license plate with the inscription “I Believe”; the design includes a Christian cross and a stained-glass window. The ACLU of Florida is opposed to the license plate. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Edward Bullard.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue took on the ACLU:

“This is not a church and state issue—it is a choice issue. No one can obtain an ‘I Believe’ license plate without purchasing it for an additional fee, and no one must buy it. Florida already allows many specialty license plates expressing all kinds of sentiments and beliefs, so to deny Christians the right to adopt a plate which expresses their convictions is to sanction discrimination. Moreover, the ACLU, as usual, is being hypocritical.

“In the 1980s and 1990s, the ACLU chapters in Louisiana and Pennsylvania opposed laws which limited the size of vulgarities on bumper stickers. For example, words that described bodily functions, women’s body parts and sex acts were only allowed if the lettering was in small print; the ACLU objected to this condition. As I pointed out in my book, *Twilight of Liberty: The Legacy of the ACLU*, the head of

the Pittsburgh chapter at the time offered the following advice to motorists caught behind a car with a vulgar bumper sticker: 'You can look at traffic, the trees, the cars around you.'

"The ACLU should take some of its own medicine: Those motorists who are offended by the Christian cross and an 'I Believe' specialty license plate should stare at the trees. As for Rep. Kelly Skidmore, a Catholic who opposes the license plate because 'I don't want to see the Star of David next. I don't want to see a Torah next,' she needs to get over it. Censorship of the public expression of religion is un-American."

We are contacting every member of the Florida House. Please contact

Edward.Bullard@myfloridahouse.gov and Kelly.Skidmore@myfloridahouse.gov

DOBBS PRAISES POPE

On his CNN show last night, Lou Dobbs hosted a discussion about Pope Benedict XVI's trip to the U.S. Unlike previous nights, his panelists showed nothing but respect for the pope; Robert Zimmerman and Ed Rollins were particularly fair. But the biggest surprise came from Dobbs. Here is an excerpt from the discussion:

Rollins: "I thought the pope saying illegals should be treated in a humane way is not saying that they should stay here. I think he's basically saying you shouldn't mistreat them when they are here. Send them home, but don't mistreat them."

Dobbs: "You know, I could sign on with that...We're going to

have to take all this in. I like Pope Benedict XVI, is what [the conversation] just taught me here....By the way, I can close this out with one thing. He [the pope] changed the minds of a lot of priests around the country I believe.”

Catholic League president Bill Donohue was pleased with this outcome:

“To his credit, last night Lou Dobbs pivoted away from his previous remarks about the pope and conducted himself in a most professional manner. What cannot be picked up from the transcript was the sincerity of his comments. In doing so, he put to rest any concerns we may have had. This case is closed.”

DOBBS BASHES POPE AGAIN

Over the weekend, CNN host Lou Dobbs lashed out at Pope Benedict XVI again; his first rant was on April 17. Here is a selection of what Dobbs said over the weekend:

- “Well, he’s [the pope] mixing religion and politics on his first trip to this country. We’ll tell you how the pope is blasting our society, our immigration policy and a little more, as well.”
- “Here he is, I guess, in many ways insulting our country, talking about the need to be welcoming, taking up the issue of illegal immigration without any comparison to the rest of the world.”
- “Well, he’s in America, partner. And you know what, when we’re in Rome, we’ll do as Rome does. But when Rome comes to America, how about a little salute and stay out of our

politics.”

• “I don’t care if he listens or not, but I’m going to send him the message [of staying out of politics] because I really don’t appreciate the bad manners of a guest telling me in this country and my fellow citizens what to do.”

Catholic League president Bill Donohue responded as follows:

“If the pope is so accusatory of the United States, how can Dobbs explain the cover story in *Time* magazine (which is the flagship publication of Time Warner—the parent company of CNN as well)? It reads, ‘Why the Pope Loves America.’ And if Dobbs is right about the pope blasting America, how come *no one* else agrees with him?

“Someone needs to give Dobbs a copy of the First Amendment: it guarantees freedom of religion and freedom of speech, two rights that apply to the clergy as well as the laity. Was Rev. Martin Luther King sticking his nose into the political affairs of the U.S. as well? Or does Dobbs just hyperventilate when bishops address immigration issues?

“Dobbs needs a reality check. I’d be glad to give him one if he would like.”

Contact Jim McGinnis, the show’s executive producer, at jim.mcginis@turner.com

MAHER APOLOGIZES

On his HBO show last night, Bill Maher apologized for accusing the pope of being a Nazi; he acknowledged that the Catholic League was right when we said that Joseph Ratzinger was forced to join a German youth organization (from which he fled at the

first instance). Maher then said that if a CEO were in charge of an institution that housed molesters, he would be fired.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented as follows:

“We accept Maher’s apology for accusing the pope of being a Nazi. Too bad he didn’t stop there. For him to suggest that Pope Benedict XVI was in charge of policing molesters, and failed in doing so, is patently absurd.

“As Pope John Paul II’s right-hand man, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s principal job was to make sure that theologians were faithfully presenting the teachings of the Catholic Church. He was, to some extent, the Church’s Academic Dean, someone who was charged with enforcing academic standards. He was not the Church’s Dean of Students, i.e., he was not discharged with enforcing codes of conduct. Indeed, it wasn’t until after the scandal hit the newspapers in 2002 that he was put in charge of dealing with predatory priests, and by all accounts did so effectively.

“Maher has to understand that no one person, including the pope, could possibly be held accountable for the behavior of its employees in a global institution. There are priests from Boston to Bosnia, and it is simply preposterous for any one person to know exactly what is going on everywhere at any given time. Maher would have been better advised to focus on those bishops who proved to be enablers—it is the bishop’s job to know what is going on in his diocese, not the pope’s.

“The larger issue remains. It would be great if Maher gave up his Catholic-bashing obsession once and for all.”

DONOHUE TO DOBBS: APOLOGIZE OR DEBATE ME

Yesterday, after first addressing the Catholic Church's failure to act responsibly in handling the sex abuse scandal, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the social context in which the scandal took place, asking, "What does it mean to speak of child protection when pornography and violence can be viewed in so many homes through media widely available today?" On his CNN show last night, Lou Dobbs made the following comments about the pope:

"I don't want to put you [addressing a guest] in jeopardy of either perdition or Hell itself. But, so I will gamble this, may I? The idea that the pope would come here and criticize the United States this way is, I think, first of all bad manners. I don't care if you're *infallible* [sarcastically] or not. So it's bad manners. Number two, it is absolutely out of all proportion with the world scale. This is the most welcoming nation, the most generous nation on the face of the earth. And for this pope to have this attitude and to make these comments is, in my opinion, absolutely repugnant... I'm on my way to Hell... It seems to me that if one is going to reach to the level that he did, you have to have some moral standing for it. And what has been happening to this church...for the last decade, seems to leave open his standing, cleaning up his own house. I don't know if there is a scriptural reference there, but it seems to me that, glass houses, stones. Whatever it may be, it's just bad manners."

Responding is Catholic League president Bill Donohue:

"What the transcript doesn't reveal is the tone of Dobbs' remarks. He was sarcastic and insulting throughout. Dobbs can either apologize for his offensive remarks, or he can invite me on his show to debate him. Enough is enough—this guy has

crossed the line big time.”

Contact Jim McGinnis, the show's executive producer, at jim.mcginnis@turner.com

MAHER SET TO APOLOGIZE FOR POPE-NAZI QUIP

Catholic League president Bill Donohue received a phone call today from an HBO executive regarding the league's news release of April 14 on Bill Maher. Here is what Donohue had to say about it:

“On Monday morning, we issued a news release on Maher's vicious attack on the pope and the Catholic Church that occurred the previous Friday night on his weekly show. Subsequently, many media outlets picked up on our release and pounded Maher for his bigotry. *Investor's Business Daily*, Mike Gallagher, Steve Malzberg, Les Kinsolving of *WorldNetDaily*, *Newsbusters*, *Newsmax*, Bill O'Reilly, Bill Cunningham, *Cybercast News Service*, *Culture and Media Institute*, *Relevant Radio's* Drew Mariani and others were justly outraged.

“Today, I spoke to an HBO official and he told me that Maher is expected to apologize tomorrow night for falsely accusing the pope of once being a Nazi. As I said on Monday, ‘Like all young men in Germany at the time, he [Joseph Ratzinger] was conscripted into a German Youth organization (from which he fled as soon as he could).’ I went on to say that ‘Every responsible Jewish leader has acknowledged this reality and has never sought to brand the pope a Nazi.’

“After researching this matter, HBO concurs with this

assessment. Apparently, now Maher does as well. Ergo, the apology.

“Will the Catholic League accept Maher’s apology? Assuming it comes across as genuine, the answer is yes. But I hasten to add that what we would really like to see is for Maher to stop with his hateful diatribes against the Catholic Church. So this is a start, but it hardly puts to rest our concerns. After all, there are plenty of factually accurate things Maher could say about other groups that would insult its members, but he chooses not to go there. Perhaps he can add Catholics and the Catholic Church to that protected list as well.”

“NIGHTLINE” GUILTY OF INJUSTICE AND HYPOCRISY

Last night on ABC’s “Nightline,” there was a segment on the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church that focused on Chicago Archbishop Francis Cardinal George. It took him to task for the way he handled a case dealing with Rev. Daniel McCormack.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue slammed “Nightline” today:

“What happened last night was incredible. ‘Nightline’ questioned whether accused priests are entitled to due process. A few years ago, as the segment made clear, Cardinal George took back into ministry an accused priest whom the police found innocent. So what? Isn’t this what happens every day in America—those found not guilty resume their jobs? Isn’t this the logical consequence of innocent until proven guilty? The fact that this same priest was later found guilty of

groping a male doesn't change what's at stake. Moreover, 'Nightline' didn't tell the whole story.

"In the initial case, the police *and* the Cook County prosecutors found no credible allegations against McCormack. Interestingly, the Department of Children and Family Services concluded he may be guilty *but never notified* the archdiocese or the school where the priest was working that it was conducting an investigation. To top it off, the agency didn't even bother to tell them *after* it suspected he may be guilty.

"What is really mind-blowing is ABC's hypocrisy. In 2003, Steve Bartelstein, the New York anchor at WABC-TV, was accused of sexually harassing and stalking a male writer and producer at the station. WABC launched an investigation and concluded there was no evidence to remove Bartelstein and allowed him to keep his job; he was fired in 2007 for another matter. And last year in Miami, ABC reporter Jeff Weinsier at WPLG was arrested for carrying a loaded gun on school property while investigating school violence. He kept his job, too. But if they were subjected to ABC's Cardinal George standard, they would have been canned immediately. Does ABC have any shame?

"An apology to Cardinal George, and to all priests, should be made by ABC." Contact the executive producer at james.goldston@abc.com

SNAP'S "LAST HURRAH"

Yesterday, before he landed in the U.S., Pope Benedict XVI said he was "deeply ashamed" of predatory priests, adding that pedophiles would be rooted out of the Church. Today, the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) is holding a press conference in Washington criticizing the pope for not

doing enough.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue responded as follows:

“Any minor who has been sexually molested deserves our compassion. But what SNAP is doing, aided and abetted by angry Catholics and ex-Catholics, deserves not our understanding, but contempt. This is a group which has a deep ideological and financial investment in painting the Catholic Church as a villain.

“SNAP’s ideological bias stems from the fact that it positively refuses to recognize the incredible progress that has been made—exactly five priests out of more than 40,000 had accusations made against them for abusing a minor in 2007—yet for SNAP it’s never enough. Financially, it derives much of its funding from the steeple-chasing lawyers who have fleeced the ‘deep pocket’ Catholic Church. It’s time we dismissed these professional victims’ advocates for what they are—activists whose goal is to discredit the Church.

“Once the pope leaves, SNAP may as well close up shop. The reforms that have already been made have made the group increasingly irrelevant, and it’s just a matter of time before it becomes obsolete altogether. So they should enjoy their little ceremony today—this is SNAP’s last hurrah.”

DISSIDENTS ARE A MOTLEY CREW

Here is how Catholic dissidents are responding to the pope’s visit:

- The National Coalition of American Nuns, a pro-abortion group, says the pope is not welcome

- The Women's Ordination Conference played a game of make-believe by having women dress up like priests to say Mass
- Dignity, a group which once appointed gay rapist Paul Shanley its chaplain, is staging a protest of the pope's visit
- New Ways Ministry, a pro-sodomy group, held a press conference on gay sex that no one attended
- Catholics for a Free Choice, an anti-Catholic front group, is hawking condoms and wants no one to leave home without one
- SNAP, a gang of professional victims greased by lawyers who have exploited the church, wants the U.N. to investigate the Vatican
- Voice of the Faithful, which is on the verge of bankruptcy, is lecturing the pope about Church finances
- Rainbow Sash, a gay happy group, says it will throw ashes at the pope instead of confetti

Catholic League president Bill Donohue responded as follows:

"These groups are dying out fast. Staffed by senior citizens who are angry that the Church didn't turn left, they have almost no members under the age of 90 (okay, maybe 85).

"They will be joined by the American Atheists and the Westboro Baptist Church: the former is protesting what it calls the 'Vatican/Ratzinger agenda' (sounds great to me) and the latter is protesting what it calls the 'Great Whore' (wasn't that in the news recently?).

"There was a time when such groups were taken seriously. But that time has long past. Instead, most Catholics will agree with our [op-ed page tribute](#) to the pope in today's *New York Times*, and not with these unhappy campers. Indeed, they'll likely be so gay as to break out the confetti."