

Charity Ball for Life

On February 5, Catholic League President William A. Donohue and his wife attended the Charity Ball for Life sponsored by the New York Catholic Forum, and held at the Women's National Republican Club. Rev. Richard John Neuhaus was the principal celebrant and homilist at a Mass for Life at St. Patrick's Cathedral preceding the event.

Anti-Catholicism... Subtly

*A poster which hung in my fifth-grade English classroom depicted a comically dressed Charlie Brown. He appeared to be perplexed and somewhat deep in thought as he said "Maturity is the ability to laugh at yourself." There is a danger in becoming too sensitive, so thin-skinned that we can't even enjoy a light-hearted look at our faith. (How many could really find fault with Bing Crosby in "Bells of St. Mary's," or Fr. Mulcahy in M*A*S*H?) But lately, it seems as though too much is being passed off as acceptable, as not offensive enough to merit a response. This attitude of approval needs to be reexamined.*

There is a certain discernment process in determining the seriousness of a criticism or critique of the Catholic Church and its members. There is no set gauge by which we can measure harm – what offends some is likely to be shrugged off by others. While it is important not to overreact, it is equally important not to be passive in the face of bigotry.

Consider the following, all of which were brought to our attention during the last week of February: (for the outcomes, see future issues of *Catalyst*):

- In the comic strip **Non Sequitur** by Wiley (*Washington Post*, 2/18/94), under the caption, "The Beginning of a Crisis in Faith," one cardinal remarks to another, "Something's wrong ... I'm not feeling guilty about anything."
- From the syndicated cartoon **Mother Goose and Grim** by Mike Peters (2/23/94), the caption, "When the dust settled, the bar was a wreck, bodies and broken chairs everywhere; but no one ever again called St. Francis a sissy," accompanies a caricature of St. Francis of Assisi walking amidst a wrecked bar scene.
- Radio station KGB K-Pop of San Diego, California, broadcasts a "confessional" program each Wednesday morning. "Reverend Dave," assisted by "Sr. Dunn," hosts "Lash Wednesday," a call-in program where sinners can receive "absolution of sins against society," among other things. The winner, declared the "sin, sinniest sinner" wins a prize ranging from videotapes to vacations for what Rev. Dave considers to be the most "heinous crime," nearly all of which are sexually vulgar.
- US West Direct's newest yellow pages telephone directory contains nursing home ads which are nearly devoid of religious references. US West contends that they were merely abiding by the non-discrimination policy as established by the Federal Fair Housing Act when they removed logo's and changed descriptions in ads for two nursing homes, one Catholic and one Lutheran.
- Mother Productions, a 5-year-old trading-card company in Anaheim, California, recently unveiled its newest collection. "Perverted Priests," a set of 36 cards, promises "100% unnatural corrupted clergy, demented deacons, maniac messiahs, sinister ministers, heinous horny healers and lesbian nuns."

While these examples run from the benign to the contemptible, it is the cumulative effect which is actually the most damaging. The dramatic rise in physical and verbal attacks on

the clergy, religious and houses of worship provide grim testimony to the long term effects of even the most subtle jokes. The attitude of the nation has been completely altered in little more than one generation. Society no longer affords to clergy and religious the traditional level of respect. The Eucharist is desecrated, churches are vandalized and religious life receives unmerciful commentary in editorial cartoons, from politicians and comedians.

Catholics are relatively new (or slow?) to the fight for civil rights. Anti-Catholicism does not roll off the tongue as readily as does anti-Semitism. As Catholics, we have not established the notion in society that anti-Catholicism is as unacceptable as any other form of discrimination. Those most to blame for this lack of recognition are Catholics themselves. Yes, the media, public officials, Hollywood and others all contribute, but in the end, they will carry the offenses only as far and as long as we allow it. For a better perspective on how skewed the treatment of Catholics is, try substituting another race, class, religion or such group into a common stereotype. Have we seen jokes that infer that all black men are pedophiles based on the accusations leveled against Michael Jackson? No, but we have seen time and time again the inference that no Roman Catholic priest is to be trusted with young boys because of the few who have gone astray.

We cannot become so numb that only the hate speech of spokesmen for the Nation of Islam or the actions of a Sinead O'Connor incite us to react. Nor should we become so ultra-sensitive that we allow nothing to pass without criticism. A balance must be found, a balance between extremism and complacency. It is possible to be both combative and responsible. We wage battle not against one single incident, one criticism, one issue. We are fighting a long uphill fight to change the mindset of society, so that no longer will we – and most especially, the Church – be the object of one of the

last acceptable forms of prejudice.

-Karen Lynn Krugh

Former Brooklyn-Queens chapter president dies

Loretta Mary McDermot Winters, 78, an active and lifelong parishioner of St. Francis de Sales, Belle Harbor, New York, and onetime president of the Brooklyn-Queens Chapter of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, died at Calvary Hospital, January 9, 1994. She was also active in the right to life and Christian family movements. She is survived by her husband of 51 years, Carl, five children, and fourteen grandchildren.

Appeals Court overturns pro-life priest's conviction

The Massachusetts Court of Appeals has overturned the conviction of Rev. Thomas Carleton on the basis of improper jury selection. The court found that the Massachusetts Attorney-General's office, which prosecuted the case, had excluded jurors with Irish or Italian surnames because they might have been Catholic.

Father Carleton, a member of Operation Rescue, had been tried for his participation in an abortuary protest.

Catholic League officials hailed his victory and blasted the Attorney General's office for discrimination.

Catholic League Operations Director C. J. Doyle stated, "Attorney General L. Scott Harsbarger's office engaged in ethnic and religious discrimination against Catholics in order to secure a favorable verdict in a controversial case. Such conduct, which creates a religious test for jury service, is illegal and unconstitutional. Following the attempt to prevent Father Carleton from wearing clerical garb, or being addressed as "Father," in court, it suggests a pattern of hostility to the civil and religious rights of Catholics. It remains an outrageous double standard that Attorney General Harshbarger prosecutes members of Operation Rescue, who engage in non-violent civil disobedience, to the fullest extent of the law, while refusing to prosecute members of the militant homosexual group ACT-UP, who commit hate crimes, attempt to disrupt church services, and violate the constitutional rights of Catholics."

League condemns Boston mayor's public school condom distribution plan

The Catholic League has condemned the recommendation by the administration of Boston Mayor Thomas Menino to distribute condoms in public schools, calling it "deplorable public policy" and "an assault on the moral values and religious sensibilities of taxpayers."

Catholic League Operations Director C.J. Doyle stated: "For the City of Boston to use public funds and public facilities

to promote condom use is nothing less than an attack on the moral and religious convictions of Catholic citizens of Boston. It is not government neutrality towards religion, but outright government hostility to religious values. Tax-payers, in violation of their consciences and their religious freedom rights, will be forced to subsidize behavior many find to be profoundly immoral. This policy will undermine the family, encourage teen promiscuity, and exacerbate the very problems it purports to solve.”

Pennsylvania ... Casey's 'parish'?

Bernie Shire of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference recently told *Catalyst* about a rather interesting exchange he had in the pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The saga began with a snippy column by Melissa Dribben (“Wasting Time on Abortion,” 1/20/94) bemoaning the fact that Pennsylvania Governor William Casey was about to implement the law which his state defended successfully in the U.S. Supreme Court and his refusal to implement the easy access to abortions authorized by the Clinton administration. The phrase that launched a thousand words was: “Gov. Casey believes Pennsylvania is his parish.”

Shire rightfully took umbrage at this loose lipped characterization of Casey and a Letter to the Editor duly appeared in the *Inquirer* on February 13. He called her remark “blatant anti-Catholicism,” and went on to note that her remark only served to perpetuate the pro-abortion myth that abortion is just a Catholic issue. He concluded that such

comments had no place on the Commentary page.

On February 21, the *Inquirer* published a letter from Peter Conn, a professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, arguably the nation's most politically correct campus.

Conn's message was simply stated in the headline which the *Inquirer* chose to drape above it: "Catholics need to accept their critics."

Conn's cheap shot broadside against all things Catholic ("The Catholic Church has chosen to compete in local and national politics" ... "Catholic pronouncements on human sexuality seem especially ironic and even impertinent" ... etc., etc.) would be laughable if his missive hadn't come from the University of Pennsylvania, the campus where black students were allowed to confiscate and destroy all copies of a student newspaper because it contained an alleged racial slur.

Using the same rules, the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference should have been able to round up and bum all copies of Dribben's drivel.

Shire reports that he bit his tongue and decided that it was pointless to attempt an answer to Conn's letter. We are forced to agree with that judgement but will keep an eye on future developments at the University of Pennsylvania and in Casey's "parish" as well.

We wonder what Casey's pastor thought of all this....