

PLAYBOY EXPLOITS CATHOLIC SCHOOLGIRLS

On the cover of the March *Playboy* was a picture of a young woman dressed as a Catholic schoolgirl. The woman appeared undressed in the magazine in a section titled “The Stripper Next Door.”

William Donohue denounced this abuse on the NBC show *Extra* and issued the following statement to the press:

“The cover of the March *Playboy* represents the crass sexual exploitation of Catholic schoolgirls. The title of the cover, “The Stripper Next Door,” invites its readers to see Catholic schoolgirls as being indistinguishable from the tramps that typically appear in its pages. It represents a deliberate offense against Catholic sensibilities and a calculated attempt to legitimize its depravity.

“We will not ask for an apology because to do so would imply that *Playboy* occupies a position of moral responsibility. It has shown for five decades that decadence is its trademark, so it comes as no surprise that there is nothing so vulgar that Hugh Hefner wouldn’t entertain.”

When the league asked permission from *Playboy* to reprint the cover in *Catalyst*, it was denied.

THE MEDIA WAR ON THE CATHOLIC

CHURCH

The coming of Spring traditionally signals a new beginning, a time for men and women of good will to examine their lives and work, and to resolve to do better in the future. In that vein, I ask our national news media to consider the job they are doing of covering religion in America. Any honest examination would show that the media's treatment of religion ranges from indifference to misunderstanding. And where coverage of the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, it is openly hostile.

A recent Gallup survey showed that 95 percent of Americans believe in God; another poll showed that nine out of ten of us pray on a regular basis. Clearly, matters of faith are of great importance to the vast majority of Americans.

Yet, despite their claims that they report the news objectively, our major television networks continue to ignore this important reality. In 1994, the "Big Four" new outlets—ABC, NBC, CBA and CNN—filed some 18,000 news reports among them. Of these, only 225 (barely 1%) dealt with religious institutions, movements, or ideas. Of the approximately 26,000 morning news segments, just 151 (about one half of one percent) touched on the subject of religion. Out of hundreds of hours of network magazine shows and Sunday morning interview broadcasts, only nine segments addressed matters of religious faith. Religion is simply not on the media's radar screen as a matter of importance in contemporary American life.

When reporters do cover matters of faith, no institution is more frequently reviled than the Roman Catholic Church. During 1994, it drew the most evening news stories (103), and the hostility communicated in these stories was obvious to viewers. When the U.N. Population conference was convened in Cairo to promote worldwide contraception, abortion, and sexual liberties for adolescents, the news media openly attacked the

Catholic Church for its justifiable opposition to this agenda. Typical of the media's disgust was this reports from ABC's Jim Bitterman: "Vatican representatives at the population conference were today being cast in the role of spoiler, their stubborn style angering fellow delegates...Thousands of activists who came here to push causes from the environment to women's rights have been ignored as the representatives from 182 nations spend their time and energy on the abortion issue."

To Mr. Bitterman, sexual morality – including the moral issues involved in marriage, abortion, homosexuality, and promiscuity – is an outdated issue in the modern age, akin to urging the use of chastity belts and hourglass corsets. It was of no consequence to him that the agenda for this important U.N. conference ran counter to the basic teachings of one of the world's great faiths, developed over nearly two thousand years of its existence. Those teachings may change over time, in the light of human experience and a more perfect understanding of the Divine Will, but they are not teachings that can be put on the bargaining table at an international meeting to reach a happy consensus among this year's assortment of conference goers.

The national news media delight in portraying the Catholic Church as an intolerant and anachronistic institution, out of touch with the times. On such issues as celibacy and the priesthood, or women in the priesthood, or premarital sex, or homosexuality, the teachings of the Church will rarely get a fair shake. The media seems to think that the teachings of the Church are arrived at through bargaining and negotiation among self-appointed interest groups. They are not, and it is inexcusable that so many journalists fail to grasp such a fundamental point.

It is easier, and apparently far more satisfying, for the media simply to dismiss the Church's teachings, along with Pope John Paul II. "There are 60 million Catholics in

America," explained the *Washington Post* writer Henry Allen, "and for many of them the Pope also speaks with the voice of a conservative crank when he stonewalls on abortion, married priests, women priests, and so on." Never mind that for the vast majority of Catholics here and around the world, the Pope is an inspired religious leader who does not "stonewall" on any of these issues, but rather upholds the traditional teachings of the Church.

But when the "conservative crank" is thought to be promoting liberal causes, my how the coverage changes! Last Fall the Pope visited the United States in the midst of a rancorous debate over the federal budget. When the Pope spoke about our obligation to help the needy, many in the press found a closet endorsement of Bill Clinton and the Democratic party. "The Pope seemed to admonish the supporters of proposed laws to restrict immigration and dismantle many of the nation's programs for the poor," intoned *New York Times* Reporter Robert McFadden, "in doing so, he appeared to echo many of President Clinton's warnings." Timothy McNulty of the *Chicago Tribune* saw it the same way: "At times the Pope even sounded like a Democrat. His heart is with the have-nots. And for that, at least, liberals appreciate his views on peace and social justice."

And yet, during more than a dozen speeches during his visit, the Pope never endorsed Clinton's position on any of these issues. The Pope, like his predecessors, has spoken frequently over the years about our obligations to the poor, but he has never said that these need to be carried out through government programs of the kind promoted by liberals. Indeed, in the Pope's recent encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), he criticized the welfare state for encouraging dependence and discouraging work on the part of the poor. Instead of relying on bureaucratic programs sponsored by central governments, the Pope called on us to help the poor in more personal and neighborly ways in order to strengthen families and local

institutions.

The Pope's position, and that of the Catholic Church over the centuries, is hardly the simplistic doctrine attributed to him by the reporters quoted above. It should not be all that difficult for journalists to give an honest and factual account of the Church's position on a subject like this or, indeed, to consult the documents of the Church before rendering an opinion about it.

The most important moral issue facing the Catholic Church is the plague of abortion. In the last two decades, some 30 million unborn babies have died. Thirty million souls who will never have the chance to love or laugh and cry, who will never have the chance to grow up and become doctors and musicians and architects and loving parents and bless our country in many and magnificent ways.

In 1994, there were a total of 247 network news stories that touched on this vital moral issue, but very few presented the pro-life position in an objective or fair-minded way. The violence of abortion, the moral anguish it produces, adoption and other alternatives to abortion – these aspects of the issue were all but ignored by the national news media.

What, then, was the focus of the news coverage? Fully two out of three of these networks stories dealt, not with the abortion issue itself, but rather with the different subject of pro-life violence against "abortion rights advocates." The insinuations in many of these stories were downright insulting to those who support the pro-life position. When Dr. David Gunn was murdered, CBS anchor Bob Schieffer reported that, "We've all noticed that there has been a link between crime and religion." ABC's Linda Pattillo was even more vitriolic, labeling the pro-life movement "an organized campaign of domestic terrorism."

To be sure, violence at abortion clinics was an important

story deserving of coverage, though it was manifestly unfair for reporters to suggest that such violence is condoned or encouraged by the pro-life movement. When pro-life activists or the Catholic Church itself are attacked, however the national media conveniently look the other way. In 1994, for example, there were numerous documented cases of violence aimed at right-to-life activists, including the shooting of one such activist in Louisiana. Only CNN covered the story.

A few years ago, a group of protesters invaded St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, and disrupted a mass that was being conducted by John Cardinal O'Connor. These "activists" blocked the aisles and prevented worshippers from receiving Holy Communion as a protest against the Church's teaching on homosexuality. The mainstream news media sympathized with the protesters, and thus did not bother to condemn this naked act of religious bigotry. All of this simply underscores an ugly but inescapable reality in America today: prejudice is still condoned as part of our national conversation, as long as it is being directed against the Catholic Church.

How does one explain this ignorance on the subject of religion? William Cardinal Keeler has observed that on any given Sunday there are more people attending church services than all national sports events combined, and yet, while all networks have sports divisions, none has a religion division and only one has an official religion reporter. Several years ago, Professor Robert Lichter conducted a survey of the national news media and found that 50 percent of journalists do not believe in God, 86 percent seldom or never attend religious services, and only 2 percent are practicing Catholics. Ninety percent support abortion, 76 percent believe that adultery is permissible. Their hostility toward principles of the Catholic faith is not a reflection of public opinion but of their own beliefs.

The national news media need to come to terms with their ignorance of, and contempt for, matters of religious faith in

general and of the Catholic Church in particular. Until they do, they make a mockery of the term “objectivity.”

CATHOLIC BAITING PUNDITS SCORE BUCHANAN

The rise in popularity of presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan has triggered a trail of Catholic baiting remarks from some of the nation’s leading political pundits. On February 28, Catholic League president William Donohue spoke at the National Press Club in Washington, DC addressing this issue. Representatives from the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish were there to comment on how unfair some in the media have been in making Buchanan’s religion the target of controversy.

Dr. Donohue stressed that the Catholic League was not in any way lending its support to Buchanan. Indeed, he said that if Buchanan happened to be a liberal Democrat, the Catholic League would respond exactly the same way. He then cited several instances where the media had unfairly invoked Buchanan’s religion. Here is a sample of the issues he discussed.

The following comments all appeared in the latter part of February:

- On ABC’s “Nightline,” there is a thinly veiled attempt to establish a cause and effect relationship between Buchanan’s Jesuit training and his alleged sympathy for bigotry. This show, which aired on February 23, was cited as the most offensive misuse of Buchanan’s religious heritage.

- On NBC's the "McLaughlin Group," Newsweek columnist Eleanor Clift said of Buchanan that "He's even more giddy than when he kept the Uzzi and the rosary beads under that chair."
- On CNN's news with Wolf Blitzer, Mark Russell opined, "You've heard him say, 'When I take my hand off the Bible, my friends, I will put Rottweilers and pit bulls on the Mexican border, and nuns into the public schools.' Or is it nuns on the Mexican border and Rottweilers in the public schools?"
- In articles that appeared on the same day in the New York Observer, one speaks of "Mr. Buchanan's nominal religion" and the other states that he is a "fervent member" of Roman Catholicism. It is also said that Buchanan is a "champion of the unborn, the orthodox and perhaps even the Latin mass."
- The New York Times, the Washington Post and Newsweek closely examine Buchanan's religion with an eye toward explaining his "fascistic" politics.
- Newsday on Long Island, the News in Stuart, Florida, and the Oregonian print cartoons that malign Buchanan by attacking his religion.

The Catholic League released the following comment to the media on this issue:

"This kind of commentary is despicable. Presidential candidates should be assessed on the basis of their views, not their religious background. If the same tactic had been used to discredit Arlen Specter, it would have been quickly branded anti-Semitic. Why this assault isn't labeled Catholic baiting is a telling statement on the media. The constant references to Buchanan's 'Jesuit' training, especially when coupled with critical statements about the candidate, is done not to educate but to inflame. The media should retire its red flags once and for all."

The media covered the press conference but did not give it the

kind of attention that the issue merited, raising even more questions about the way reporters respond to Catholic baiting.

GRAMMY NOMINEE JOAN OSBORNE “RELISHES” CONTROVERSY

In her album “Relish,” Grammy Nominee Joan Osborne has released two songs, both of which use Catholic themes in a manner that is disturbing. Though Osborne did not win a Grammy, she was nominated in five categories for her work.

Newsweek described Osborne’s work as “an enticing marriage of the sexual and the spiritual,” while Entertainment Weekly praises her song One of Us for being “spiritual and sacrilegious—a songwriting feat.” One of Us, which was also nominated as “Song of the Year,” contains the following lyrics:

“What if God was one of us, just like a slob like one of us. Just like a stranger, on a bus, trying to make his way home. If God had a face what would he look like? And would you want to see if seeing it meant that you had to believe in things like heaven and Jesus and the saints and all the prophets?” This line is followed by the refrain, “yeah, yeah, yeah” and closes with lines about God riding on a bus all alone, going up to Heaven all alone, “nobody calling on the phone, `cept maybe the Pope in Rome.” In the video for this song, a man dressed as the Pope is shown on the phone while at the beach and an “angel” is shown skating on a boardwalk.

In her other controversial song, St. Teresa, Osborne blends commentary on St. Teresa of Avila with a tale of a drug abusing prostitute. “Oooh, St. Teresa higher than the

moon...every stone a story like a rosary," is one of the lyrics.

The Catholic League announced its objections as follows:

"It is no wonder that Joan Osborne instructs her fans to donate their time and money to Planned Parenthood. It is of a piece with her politics and her prejudices. Her songs and videos offer a curious mix of both, the effect of which is to dance awfully close to the line of Catholic baiting. If even her admirers see something of the sacrilegious in her work, it is hard to maintain that Osborne doesn't have an agenda. It is our hope that she doesn't let her sentiments regarding Catholicism get in the way of whatever artistic abilities she has."

The media reaction to the league's concerns was substantial. Both Dr. Donohue and executive assistant Susan Fani were interviewed by several newspapers, radio and television shows. The league is delighted that Osborne failed to win an award, but nonetheless pledges to track her work in the future.

"PICKET FENCES" MAY CRUMBLE

The word from Hollywood is that the CBS show, "Picket Fences," may be retired. The show has suffered from low ratings and was bumped from its Friday 10 p.m. time slot in February. Though a decision to cancel the show has not yet been made, the prospects are not good.

The Catholic League has made several complaints about "Picket Fences" for the way it portrays Roman Catholicism.

ARMY AND MARINE CORPS CHANGE DAY CARE POLICIES

Until February, 1996, the Army and Marine Corps were content to have a day care policy that effectively denied the rights of religious day care providers who worked out of their homes. Under the old rules, such providers were barred from partaking in any religious exercises in their homes. But three Army couples decided to challenge the regulation and won. The Marine Corps said it will change its regulations as well.

Previously, Army and Marine Corps regulations even denied the practice of family day care providers saying grace with the children before meals. But a three judge panel of the Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Army had violated the religious freedom First Amendment rights of the couple involved in the case.

Under the new policy, those who provide day care in their homes will inform parents before they enroll their children if religious activities are part of the program. Neither the Navy nor the Air Force have similar rules. The change in the Army and Marine Corps policies will impact worldwide, but will not affect child care centers that are based outside the home; they are still subject to a ban on religious activities.

PBS ' "FRONTLINE" EXPLOITS CATHOLICISM IN ABORTION PROGRAM

On Tuesday, February 6, PBS aired a program called, *Murder on "Abortion Row."* The two hour special purported to be a serious look at the life of John Salvi, the person who wounded five and killed two women working at a Brookline, Massachusetts abortion clinic on December 30, 1994.

The Catholic League was given an opportunity to preview the program and offered the following comments to the press:

"The FRONTLINE program, *Murder on 'Abortion Row'*, is nothing more than a front for Planned Parenthood and an irresponsible propaganda piece against Catholicism.

"John Salvi is obviously a very disturbed individual. As such, anyone truly interested in his aberrant behavior would investigate the psychodynamics that drives his condition. Instead, what FRONTLINE tries to give us is a sociological portrait, one that seeks to establish Catholicism as the foundation of Salvi's derangement. This abusive social science technique could be used to indict any institutional milieu, but somehow FRONTLINE seems content to apply it only to Catholicism.

"FRONTLINE wants to displace the individual guilt of John Salvi onto the teachings of Roman Catholicism. Its deliberate portrayal of Catholic symbols when discussing Salvi's behavior adds to its ploy. We hear from Planned Parenthood's Nikki Nichols-Gamble, but we don't hear the bigoted assault she made on Cardinal O'Connor and the cheap misuse of Cardinal Law's statements that were made at the time of the tragedy.

“Hours of taped interviews with responsible pro-life advocates in Massachusetts were never aired, the effect of which is to show pro-lifers as extremists and pro-choicers as reasonable. This smacks of a political agenda and is not the work of professionals seeking to uncover the truth.

“If someone were to do a portrait of the behavior of Colin Ferguson, the man who randomly killed innocent white passengers on a Long Island Rail Road car in 1994, by referencing his roots in the black community, it would properly be seen as racist. It is hoped that those who see this FRONTLINE program will properly label it as anti-Catholic bigotry.”

NEW “THORN BIRDS” FLOPS

The CBS movie, “Thorn Birds: The Missing Years,” which aired on February 11 and 13, was almost universally panned by the critics and proved just as unattractive to viewers. Unlike the 1983 movie, the “Thorn Birds,” this 1996 version was not based on the Colleen McCullough book by that name, and in fact did not receive the endorsement of the author.

In “Thorn Birds: The Missing Years,” we learn of two bishops who attack the Church for not doing enough about saving Jews during World War II. The subject of the Church’s politics and power—always inflated—is used as the basis for discussing the Church’s role during the Holocaust. Indeed, a Cardinal is depicted as complaining about what a scandal it would be if Catholics learned how much the Church actually spent on helping Jews escape persecution.

Archbishop Ralph de Brissart, played by Richard Chamberlain, is routinely referred to as Father Ralph; he fathered a son by

Meggie Cleary O'Neill, though it is not widely known, including to O'Neill's husband, Luke. One of Luke O'Neill's major complaints is that his son is being indoctrinating to become a priest.

The courtroom scene was perhaps the most objectionable part of the movie. The boy is interrogated by a judge in a custody hearing and is subjected to lengthy questioning about his interest in becoming a priest. Questions are asked about the Church and the Pope and whether the boy owes his allegiance to the Pope or to "King and country."

The judge is particularly upset with the boy's "obsession" with his religion, declaring how unhealthy such a virtue really is. That is why the judge thinks it is important that the boy be sent to a foster home: it is necessary to undo the damage that has been done by his disturbing attraction to Catholicism.

It is clear that the show bombed with the public, but it is also clear that Hollywood has a fixation on painting Catholicism in a negative way.

POSTING TEN COMMANDMENTS DRAWS VOTES

On February 22, the Tennessee Senate approved by a vote of 27 to 1 a resolution urging homes, businesses, schools and places of worship to post the Ten Commandments. The vote was a response to an opinion by the State Attorney General that the measure is unconstitutional.

Two days earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a

case that challenged the Colorado Supreme Court's decision to keep a monument engraved with the Ten Commandments. The Colorado court said that the monument, which is placed in a public park near the state Capitol, "does not have the purpose or effect of endorsing religion."

CHICAGO AND NEW YORK ARTISTS BLASPHEME CATHOLICISM

Chicago's Woman Made Gallery and New York's Slowinski Gallery recently displayed art work that defames Roman Catholicism. The Chicago exhibit, which began January 25 and ended February 23, featured many displays and was titled "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary." The New York exhibit, which began February 14 and ended March 2, showed one of the Chicago displays titled "The Annunciation." Both were graphically demeaning of the Virgin Mary, Our Blessed Mother.

The Chicago exhibit displayed the work of Susan Edwards' "Mary and Her Dog, Yellow." Edwards posed the question, "Why do people believe that she conceived a child without having sex yet can't accept that she might have had a dog?" In a display by Mary Ellen Croteau, a statue of Mary was covered with newspaper headlines that read, "Man indicted in wife's slaying" and "Rape victim dies of stab wounds." The Woman Made Gallery offers a blasphemous display every year, following Christmas. According to gallery spokeswoman Beate Minkovski, "We do a show like this after the holidays because people need sobering up."

Jennifer Karady's "The Annunciation," which was also shown in New York, is a photograph of the archangel Gabriel dressed in

white with large feathers; Gabriel is shown offering a pregnant Mary a wire coat hanger and in the background is a decaying church. According to Karady, her depiction affirms "every woman's right to choose motherhood as well as her right to control her own sexual identity." The New York gallery also featured a postcard of a nun who has the face of a pig surrounded by barebreasted nuns beating schoolchildren.

The Catholic League released the following statement to the press on this matter:

"If the displays leave little doubt as to what message is being conveyed, the commentary by the offending artists makes it plain that their desire is to assault the sensibilities of Catholics. Both the Chicago and the New York exhibits show once again that there is a deep problem of anti-Catholicism among some members of the artistic community. Their hatred could not be more explicit and their contempt for elementary standards of decency could not be more evident.

"The Catholic League joins with Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago in terming this kind of exhibition 'inappropriate and offensive.'"