

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION CHECKED IN SAN DIEGO

Thank to the efforts of the league's San Diego chapter president, Carl Horst, the religious rights of a young Hispanic woman have been restored in the workplace. On February 12, Ash Wednesday, the woman had the ashes on her forehead forcibly removed by her supervisor at Silvergate Retirement Residence; her boss wiped her forehead clean with a dish cloth after she refused a request to remove the ashes herself.

In response to this incident, the league sought four outcomes: it wanted a public apology from Silvergate; disciplinary action against the offender; sensitivity training for Silvergate employees regarding religious liberty in the workplace; and a formal record of this incident placed in the personnel files of the woman. The league won on all four counts.

In a news release on this subject, the national office exclaimed that "It is unacceptable for someone to wipe the ashes from the forehead of a Catholic as it would be for him to yank the yarmulke from the head of a Jew." In a statement to the San Diego media, Horst argued that the offensive act "was unlawful and reveals an attitude towards Catholics which will not be tolerated."

From the beginning, no one at Silvergate denied that the offense had taken place. Nonetheless, there was initial resistance to the league's demands. But after public pressure was triggered by the league via the media, it soon became apparent that Silvergate had to yield.

An internal investigation by Silvergate revealed that the offense necessitated strong action. As a result, the guilty

supervisor was fired. Then came a personal apology, followed by a public apology. The workshops we asked for were announced to the staff and the woman's records were made to reflect what happened. The woman decided not to return to Silvergate, though she was given the opportunity to do so.

The chief administrator of Silvergate acted responsibly by saying, "I strongly disapprove of any discriminatory action based on an employee's religious beliefs. Our staff will receive the appropriate training regarding all Civil Liberty issues including those dealing with religious issues." He added, "A letter of apology has been sent to [name withheld to protect her privacy] in addition to this public apology and the necessary disciplinary actions have been taken regarding this matter based upon our findings to date."

League chapter president Horst was unyielding in his efforts to secure justice. He met with the woman and her family, communicated with Silvergate over the matter, discussed the incident with the media and let all parties know that the league would not rest until we won.

As always, the league's preference was to resolve this issue by mobilizing the court of public opinion, as opposed to entering a brief in court. But because of the gravity of this incident, Horst, an attorney, notified Silvergate that the league was prepared to enter both arenas.

The league is pleased with the action taken by the chief administrator of Silvergate and was only too happy to take the lead in resolving this case.

“NIGHT SINS” SINS AGAINST CATHOLICS

On February 23 and 25, CBS aired a two-part movie, “Night Sins,” starring Valerie Bertinelli. Based on a novel by Tami Hoag, the second part of the series portrayed a priest who passionately kisses a woman in church and a crazed deacon who assaults the priest and then commits suicide; we also learn that the deacon harbored the body of his wife and misled many altar boys.

League president William Donohue saw the movie and sent the following statement to the media, as well as to CBS:

“Having just gotten back from California after meeting with many in the Hollywood industry, I was struck by the most recent attack on Catholicism. In ‘Night Sins,’ the viewer meets two Catholics—one a wayward priest and the other a mad deacon. As always, Catholics who are shown as loyal to the church are portrayed as suffering from some malady. Indeed, it is precisely because the deacon is depicted as ‘obsessed’ with Catholicism that he is portrayed as an evil disciplinarian.

“It was not for nothing that Valerie Bertinelli commented after the suicide of the deacon that it ‘seems like they all have a secret life, hiding their sins.’ The point, of course, is that all priests and deacons resemble the two characters depicted in the movie. Thus, Hollywood once again shows its penchant for attacking Catholicism by presenting Catholics whom no one would admire and then suggesting that most Catholics are as deviant as CBS would have us believe.”

REPORT FROM HOLLYWOOD

by William A. Donohue

My trip to Hollywood proved to be productive. First I met with Jeffrey Katzenberg of DreamWorks and then I participated in a conference sponsored by the American Cinema Foundation and the UCLA Center for Communication Policy.

I liked Katzenberg. He is an extraordinary bright and affable person, the kind of no-nonsense, yet friendly, person that I resonate with best. He asked me to see a portion of the yet unfinished animated movie, Prince of Egypt. The film is a contemporary adaptation of the Biblical story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt

From what I was able to see, the movie should be received well by Catholics and many others: it is respectful, serious and entertaining.

What impressed me most about Katzenberg (he is the one who gave us The Lion King when he was with Disney) was his genuine interest in appealing to leaders in various faith communities. After all, it is not commonplace that Catholics are asked to give their input to anything Hollywood does these days. And Katzenberg isn't blowing smoke: he has hired a very dedicated and talented woman, Tzivia Schwartz-Getzug, to concentrate solely on reaching out to religious leaders.

Katzenberg has invited me to come back in the fall to preview the movie in its entirety. I will do that. Assuming the movie stands up to what I've been exposed to already, I would hope that Catholics would support it. If it is right for us to complain when a complaint is necessary, it is only right that we give kudos to those who deserve it. Katzenberg, and producer Penney Finkelman Cox, are worthy of our praise.

My experience at the conference was, well, different. Hundreds

of Hollywood executives were present, the purpose of which was to exchange views with a handful of persons drawn from various advocacy groups.

I'm glad that the panel I was on wasn't scheduled until the afternoon. By that time I had had enough. If there is one thing I can't stand is hypocrisy and that explains why my blood was boiling when it came time to speak. Here's why.

The day began with some past executive from ABC rambling on about this and that. What caught my attention was his statement that the "truth is relative." What also caught my attention is that no one seemed to cringe, save me.

Now if the truth is relative, then nothing matters—there is no such thing as right or wrong. This, in a nutshell, is what's wrong with Hollywood (and with much of the country), yet the shame of it is that those who believe in such nonsense aren't ashamed to believe in it.

One person who knows that the truth isn't relative is Terry Jonas, president of Warner Bros. Television. Speaking to us at lunch, he said that he would put anything on TV except Nazis. "So he doesn't like Nazis," I said sarcastically. Those at my table stared at me, and then I exclaimed, "Well, neither do I. In fact, I think Nazis should be shot. But why is it that he isn't bothered by anything else that's on TV?" No one spoke.

Mr. Jonas also told us that he is a family man that whenever he checks into a hotel with his family, he has the porno channel yanked. This admission came after two other men, one from ABC and the other from Columbia TriStar, stated that they never allow their kids to watch what's on TV at 8:00. In fact, they both said that they watch nothing but Nickelodeon. One of them said the TV is always turned to the Nickelodeon channel in his house.

Then I got a chance to sound off. I began by telling the crowd that they were a bunch of hypocrites, bordering on being

liars. How dare they tell us that what they are producing isn't good enough for their kids. Precisely which kids is it good for, I asked. Isn't it nice to know that while other kids are getting their minds polluted with the rot that's on TV, the sons and daughters of those who make this garbage are watching "I Love Lucy."

Obviously, I also told the crowd to lay off the Church. When asked what could be done to please me, I said they could all learn from Jeffrey Katzenberg. They could begin by employing someone like Tzivia to reach out to us.

I can say this much. The Catholic League is well-known in Hollywood, and even after my talk, I had the chance to speak to many executives who are trying to do the right thing. So there is good and bad in Hollywood, just like any place else.

And yes, I was spared the goat cheese and white wine. Jeff Katzenberg told me he wouldn't think of having anything but pizza and beer. My kind of guy.

PENN STATE GETS WORSE

In the January-February edition of Catalyst, we reported on an incredibly vulgar and blasphemous piece of student "art" at Penn State. The work in question was a huge man-made bloody vagina, adorned with human hair, with a statue of Our Blessed Lady placed inside; created in the shape of a grotto, this was displayed on the grounds of the campus by the offending student. After Catholic students complained, it was removed by the student.

The league let Dr. Graham Spanier, the president of Penn State, know just how angry it was at this flagrant abuse. And

Dr. Donohue brought this incident to national attention by mentioning it on the CNN show, Crossfire. Catholic League members responded with vigor by writing to Dr. Spanier about this matter.

Because the initial response of the university was unsatisfactory, the league continued to press its case. In a letter to Donohue on February 17, Dr. Spanier indicated that remedial action had been taken to prevent similar abuses in the future and that he was entirely "sympathetic" with the league's concerns. But no sooner had the letter arrived when the same student struck again.

The female student who is responsible for all this (she is alleged to be Catholic) has now displayed more of her creativity in an exhibition entitled, "Twenty-Five Years of Virginity." On display at the Zoeller Gallery of the School of Visual Arts at Penn State is her five by five matrix of panties in various colors with a cross stitched on the crotch.

What makes this all the more outrageous is that her work is part of a jury exhibition under the tutelage of Jim Stevenson, the Director of Visual Arts; he reports to Dean Neil Porterfield, the person who president Spanier said would be contacting the league about the first case, but never did. The student's contribution was scheduled to be on display until March 23.

The university's response to this latest incident shows just how callous the school is to Catholics. Dr. James B. Stewart, Vice Provost for Educational Equity, has said of the Zoeller display that "while there are perhaps two pieces that express criticism of religion, two other pieces express very positive views of religious life." He concluded that "taken together, the exhibit was balanced."

But since when is it acceptable to "balance" indecency with decency? Imagine if this were some other religion and a vulgar

attack on it were “balanced” with a admirable display? Would Dr. Stewart consider the case closed?

Even worse is the reaction of the Staff of the Penn State Catholic Community, anchored by its director, Rev. Frederick Byrne. Father Byrne, while professing “deep unhappiness” with the offending student’s behavior, nonetheless wrote to Dr. Stewart saying “our Community is not suggesting that the artist’s intention was to be offensive.” He also wrote to president Spanier assuring him that he did not think that the university was anti-Catholic.

The Catholic League considers this latest assault to be unconscionable, especially since it has occurred under the auspices of the university. The league will take its complaint to the public, to the university’s trustees, to the accrediting body of the school and to state legislators who vote on funding for Penn State. We encourage our members to write directly to the following individuals.

Dr. Graham Spanier
President
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802

Dr. James B. Stewart
Vice Provost for Educational Equity
313 Old Main
University Park, PA 16802

Rev. Frederick Byrne, O.S.B.
Director, Penn State Catholic Community
207 Eisenhower Chapel
University Park, PA 16802

MOTHER TERESA MADE OBJECT OF DERISION MOTHER TERESA MADE OBJECT OF DERISION

Mother Teresa is being made the object of derision by Bongo Java, a coffeehouse enterprise in Nashville, Tennessee. Bongo Java is selling a cinnamon bun that bears a likeness to the face of Mother Teresa. Called the NunBun, the pastry was purchased by Bongo Java employee Todd Truley for distribution; it is being hawked on the company's web site.

The advertisement admits that the NunBun is supposed to be Mother Teresa. A side business of Bongo Java, Global Pastry Management, was formed to market the NunBun, and now has a line of products that include T-shirts, bookmarks, prayer cards and coffee mugs.

The league did not see the humor in all this and sent a letter to Mr. Truley asking him to withdraw his product. We stressed that he would not dare market a bun that featured the faces of Amos and Andy, and therefore any representation that belittles Mother Teresa should be seen as equally objectionable.

Members can write to Todd Truley at Global Pastry Management, c/o Bongo Java, 2007 Belmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37212.

PHILADELPHIA COLUMNIST TAKES CHEAP SHOT

Melissa Dribben, a columnist for the Philadelphia Inquirer, wrote an article in February about Secretary of State Madeline Albright's newly discovered Jewish ancestry. The piece was okay save for one cheap shot. Speaking rhetorically, Dribben made the point how Jewish kids are often subjected to anti-Semitism, as in the (seemingly) proverbial comment offered by "parochial schoolkids" to Jewish students charging that they will "go to hell because you guys killed Christ."

The league objected to this caricature arguing that this comment is not a staple among Catholic schoolkids. Indeed, the league contended that "it may be that Dribben imagines Catholic kids are that way, but, if so, that tells us more about the content of her imagination than the reality she thinks exists."

The league is glad that the newspaper published Donohue's letter.

NEW ORLEANS PARADE REVEALS BIGOTRY

On January 25, a parade in New Orleans, the Krewe du Vieux, made statements that were both vulgar and anti-Catholic. Held the day before the Super Bowl, the parade was billed as a politically controversial alternative to the city's famous Mardi Gras parade. It proved to be just that.

As described by a local admirer, Lolis Eric Elie, "Among its marching minions were people dressed as nuns exposing plastic breasts and floats featuring sexual imagery so explicit as to be unmentionable in this, a family newspaper column."

Sponsors of the parade boast that anyone is allowed to join the march. No doubt the Klan is just as inviting.

MICHIGAN RADIO STATION DRAWS RESPONSE

WYBR/Y-102, an FM station in Big Rapids, Michigan, has drawn a letter of protest from the league for an ad it recently ran. The ad promotes the "Mike and Brian" morning show by picturing the two men dressed in a nun's habit, folding their hands in prayer-like fashion, with their eyes flipped upwards. The inscription above the picture reads, "Make them Your Morning Habit."

The league has asked the station manager to withdraw the ad.

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF CATHOLIC INMATES VIOLATED

For two years in a row, Catholic inmates in New York City prisons have had their religious rights violated by the Department of Correction. In 1996 and again in 1997, only meat dishes were served on Ash Wednesday. Last year, the Catholic

League and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York brought their case to the Department of Correction. Both organizations were assured that this would not happen again, so when the violation was repeated in 1997, stronger action was taken.

After the latest incident, the Catholic League took its complaint to New York Deputy Mayor Fran Reiter; Reiter has previously shown interest in Catholic League concerns. The league has asked for an investigation into this matter with an eye towards permanent justice. It has also asked for a review of the dietary schedule accorded Catholic inmates: there is evidence that greater accommodation is offered Muslim and Jewish inmates on their days of religious observance.

Had it not been for Catholic Charities, Catholic inmates would not have had a selection of meatless meals during Lent; only after a complaint was made was the meal schedule revised. The league expects that Deputy Mayor Reiter will cooperate in bringing on end to this matter.

HOWARD STERN STRIKES AGAIN

On Ash Wednesday, radio talk show host Howard Stern continued his assault on Catholicism, this time by doing a mock blessing with cigar ashes. The league complained once again to his producers but has no confidence that anything will be done about him. Those who think that Catholics should just accept Stern for what he is should think again: he once issued an apology to Hispanics for making anti-Latin remarks. This shows that Stern a) has a conscience b) is capable of extending apologies and c) hates Catholicism so much he just doesn't care what Catholics think of him.

League members can write to Infinity Broadcasting, 600 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022 to register their outrage.