

# VILLAGE VOICE TO CHRISTIANS: NO NEED TO APPLY

Most people think that the days are long gone when Christians were told they need not apply for a particular job. Yet in the February 17 edition of the *Village Voice*, there was a public notice ad for a pair of vocalists that ended with the following sentence: "Must be dedicated, creative, not afraid to offend everyone and anyone. NO CHRISTIANS."

After reading this, Catholic League president William Donohue called the Classified section of the newspaper requesting that the following ad be placed: "A pair of male vocalists to play with band. Must be dedicated, creative, not afraid to offend everyone and anyone. NO GAYS."

Donohue describes what happened next:

"The woman who fielded my call paused at the mention of 'NO GAYS' and said she would have to check to see if this was okay. After checking, she said that it wasn't acceptable.

"When I asked why it wasn't, she hesitated, saying that there was a word for something like this. Being a nice guy, I volunteered, 'bigoted'? Yes, she said. I then informed her that she must be mistaken because the *Village Voice* certainly has no problem with bigotry, offering as an example the 'NO CHRISTIANS' ad. That was an error, I was told, and against the rules. I got nowhere when I questioned how she could be sure that it wasn't intentional, so instead I simply asked for a copy of the rules. Lo and behold, she was unable to provide me with them.

"Disturbed again, she got off the phone to ask for more advice. I then disclosed who I was and what this was all about. Once again, she put me on hold. When she returned I told her that I was on to her game and that if I wanted to, I

could sue the newspaper for this. After a nervous reply, we ended the conversation.”

The Catholic League is not interested in suing the *Village Voice*, but it is interested in letting everyone know just how tolerant these Kings and Queens of Tolerance really are, which is why we notified the press about this incident. As for our courageous rock performers, it is obvious that when they brag about offending everyone and anyone, they really don’t mean what they say, otherwise they’d start bashing some group other than Christians.

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## “NOTHING SACRED” AXED AT LAST

Just as we were going to press, we learned that ABC apparently has decided to cancel “Nothing Sacred.” Several phone calls to the network, and everyone else connected to the show, failed to secure a definitive answer. It seems that ABC is quietly walking away from “Nothing.”

On March 19, the *Los Angeles Times* said that “Nothing” had been pulled for the next few weeks. “Although the network would not say the series is officially cancelled,” the newspaper said, “sources say it is not expected to return. The show has completed its production order, and the writing staff was completely dismissed.” The Catholic League was called by reporters who also learned that the show was unofficially pulled.

TV insiders told the league that ABC probably would not be forthcoming, and they were right. Evidently, the network doesn’t want to give the Catholic League the satisfaction of knowing that it won.

When William Donohue learned from a Catholic News Service reporter that the show was cancelled, he was delighted. He also said that the league took *some* credit for “Nothing’s” demise; he added that there was no audience for a depressing show about a dissident priest in a dysfunctional parish.

If everything that the league has learned proves to be accurate, then it is abundantly clear that this victory belongs to the members of the Catholic League. Congratulations on a job well done.

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# SHOULD CATHOLICISM BE RELEVANT?

**William A. Donohue**

On a recent television show that I was on, one of the other guests remarked that Catholicism risked becoming obsolete because its message wasn’t relevant enough to today’s Catholics. I thought this was a strange comment, especially coming from a Catholic university professor. The good news is that she’s wrong.

Those who say that Catholicism should become more relevant mean to say that the Church should alter its teachings to mirror contemporary public opinion. They err twice: a) the magisterium of the Church, i.e., the pope in communion with the bishops, does not and cannot come to conclusions regarding the proper teachings of the Church by consulting George Gallup, and b) if they did they’d kill the Church. Because the former is true, the latter does not apply. But let’s assume that it might, just for the heck of it.

It is no secret that in the past quarter century, those religions that have lost the greatest number of members have also been those that have done their best to become "relevant." For evidence, consider the sharp decline in the mainline Protestant churches: the Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran churches have all taken a hit, and none more than the Episcopal; the Episcopal has also been the most successfully "relevant."

The latest data confirm these conclusions. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has just released its 1998 yearbook. The volume lists statistics drawn from 1996, the latest year that complete data are available; it contains information on 164 U.S. churches.

The data show that the numbers posted by Roman Catholicism are the envy of other Christian churches. While two other religions witnessed higher gains than Catholicism, Churches of Christ and Latter Day Saints/Mormons, both have a base number which is a fraction of the size of the Catholic religion, making percentage increases easier to achieve. Clearly the most stunning growth occurred in the ranks of Roman Catholicism: between 1995 and 1996, membership in the Roman Catholic Church increased by 1.54%, to a record number of 61,207,914 (second to us is the Southern Baptist Convention with 15,691,964).

Numbers don't tell us everything, and indeed the case could be made that a smaller, but more unified, Catholic Church is preferable to the current state of affairs in the Church. Notwithstanding this possibility, those who instruct the Church to marry its teachings to the reigning orthodoxies of the dominant culture are simply out to lunch. Indeed, it is because the Church doesn't succumb to the lowest cultural denominator that it continues to grow. By providing eternal answers to eternal problems, the Church—in this sense—is more relevant to people's lives than virtually any other institution in society.

Let's put it this way. Those who want serious answers to serious questions don't repair to a local guru for advice, rather they confide in their parish priest. For example, if someone is given to sexual recklessness, it makes no sense to look to the Playboy Philosophy for guidance. If drinking is a curse, stopping off at Cheers for conversation won't help. If suicidal tendencies are evident, consulting Dr. Kevorkian isn't the answer. Those drawn to violence don't seek remedies by following the lead of Kung Fu and those who are depressed don't watch "Nothing Sacred" for relief. This is just common sense.

Yes, some Catholics complain about certain Church teachings. But the reason they keep coming back is because the Church doesn't attempt to mirror the culture. In a day and age of victimhood and New Age spirituality, where "feelings" are soothed by reading the latest book on "angels," it is not surprising that millions of level-headed men and women find no solace in such soft and fuzzy responses. That is why most persons inevitably seek out answers that are as timeless as they are true. And what better place to go to than the Catholic Church?

Questioning Catholicism's relevancy, then, is downright silly. Because the problems we face today are rooted in human nature, and are therefore not dramatically different from the problems faced by our ancestors, it makes great sense to look to Catholicism; possessing, as it does, lasting answers to perennial human concerns, the Roman Catholic Church cannot help but be relevant. This may not be music to the ears of those whose idea of relevancy is a hip do-it-yourself Church, but given their own indisputable irrelevancy, who really cares?

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# ATHEISM, ANTI-CATHOLICISM AND PARANOIA

*by William A. Donohue*

At the conclusion of John M. Swomley's article in the January/February edition of *The Humanist*, the credits read that he is "emeritus professor of social ethics at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, and president of Americans for Religious Liberty." It would be more accurate to say that Swomley is one of the most prominent atheists in the United States, a long-time ACLU extremist whose understanding of social ethics is on a par with Father Ray's appreciation for the Magisterium. It should also be said that Americans for Religious Liberty represents religious liberty in the same way that the People's Republic of China represents the Chinese people.

If these conclusions seem harsh, it is only because the evidence that supports them is overwhelming. The very title of Swomley's piece on the Catholic League, "A League of the Pope's Own," gives the reader a clear indication of what animates this atheist: the league is not an independent lay Catholic civil rights organization, it is a lackey of the papacy.

Swomley begins his article with boilerplate. "One of the least known and most dangerous of the far-right organizations," he writes, "is the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights." Sounds like Swomley is drinking from the same cup that allowed Hillary to imagine about a "vast right-wing conspiracy." In any event, all along I thought we were just a bunch of Catholics who were tired of being kicked around. Now I know better.

Swomley thinks the league is "little known" because "it

masquerades as a civil rights organization,” and is dangerous because “it redefines religious and civil rights as opposites to those normally understood as constitutional rights.” Now this sounds like a job for the FBI, not a professor of social ethics. But Swomley is up to the task, convincing his fellow believers in nothing that he has uncovered the hidden agenda of this nefarious band of KKKatholics.

Want to know what the league does for a living? “Chiefly, its mission is to censor or suppress any activity, language, speech, publication, or media presentation that it considers offensive to the papacy, the Vatican or the Catholic Church in America.” Never mind that the league persistently forswears any appetite for censorship, and never mind that Swomley can’t cite a single instance to buttress his case, the point he wants to make is that the league must be stopped before America is overrun by those papal loyalists. Here are the ground rules: when Jewish and black civil rights organizations protest bigotry, that’s free speech; when Catholics do so, it’s censorship.

I did not know it until I read it, but Swomley says that when I took over the league in 1993, I did so with “the assistance of Robert Destra [sic] as general counsel.” For the record, Bob was never my general counsel and he has no “a” in his surname. Robert Destro, a very bright law school professor, moved from the league’s board of directors to the board of advisors shortly after I joined the organization.

More important, Swomley argues that I have “worked hard to redefine civil liberties away from individual rights so as to oppose affirmative action, gay rights, women’s rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press.” Once again, no evidence is forthcoming. As readers of *Catalyst* know, the league never comments on affirmative action anymore than it takes a position on global warming. As for gay rights and women’s rights, the league is agnostic, taking no stand save for those instances when militant gays and feminists start bashing the

Church. Moreover, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are integral to the First Amendment, and the league is supportive of such constitutional rights.

Swomley quotes the league's by-laws but fails to mention that the ones he cites are from 1973. In another sleight of hand, he quotes a phrase from Canon Law 1369 about just punishment for blasphemy, and then claims, without warrant, that the league "exists in response" to this Canon (where he dreamed this one up, I do not know).

After the pope came to the United States in 1995, the league commented that the media had generally been fair. This unexceptional observation is read by Swomley as proof that the Catholic League "intimidated the press." Furthermore, when I wrote that "The relatively few cheap shots that were taken at the Pope by the media in October is testimony to a change in the culture," Swomley put the following spin on this sentence: "In other words, the 'change in the culture' is the elevation of the pope and church hierarchy to a position above criticism." He seems to prefer a world where anti-Catholicism is accepted to a world where tolerance is achieved, because in his mind, tolerance for Catholicism is equivalent to the establishment of a privileged position for the pope.

When I complain about a news story that gratuitously cites the Roman Catholic affiliation of a judge who rules against the legality of assisted suicide, Swomley reads this as a "threat to the American press." This is another example of his ethics: Swomley would never think of applying his "principle" to blacks when they justifiably complain about news reports that unnecessarily cite the African American heritage of a defendant.

Over and over again, Swomley associates league criticism of Catholic bashing with an attempt to censor (the thrust of this charge, which is increasingly being made, is actually to quash the league's speech). He even objects to the league's right to



call for a boycott of the sponsors of "Nothing Sacred." Yet, whenever anyone else calls for a boycott, that's free speech; when we do so, it's tantamount to fascism. This isn't Situation Ethics, it's Ethics for Some and None for Others.

A while back, the Catholic League was upset with the ADL for reneging on an award it promised author Richard Lukas for his splendid book, *Did the Children Cry? Hitler's War Against Jewish and Polish Children*. The ADL reneged because it thought the book wasn't sufficiently appreciative of the anti-Semitic strain in Polish history (after a protest, mounted in part by the league, Lukas got the award). In an amazing twist of facts, Swomley accuses the league of criticizing the ADL for presenting the award to Lukas! Not without significance, he says that the league "even" attacked the ADL, as if "the Jewish organization" (as he calls it) was somehow off-limits.

The conspiratorial mind of Professor Swomley is perhaps best revealed in his statement that "the Catholic League's main office is listed as 1011 First Avenue, which is the headquarters of Cardinal John O'Connor's archdiocese"; he says he picked up this inside information from "a directory of right-wing Catholic organizations" published by Catholics for a Free Choice (wait till he finds out that our office is adjacent to the Cardinal's!).

So what does Swomley make of all this? "In short," he concludes, "that address increasingly has been the target for censorship of any critique of the Catholic church and for the establishment of a Catholic culture as the norm in American public relations." These are the guns of war: our ethicist is taking aim at those subversives working out of the New York Catholic Command Center.

Swomley ends his creative diatribe by exclaiming, "There is a serious danger to any society or government when the leaders of any church or secret organization under its control can intimidate and suppress information and opinion." This has me

confused. If the Catholic League is a secret organization, then why is it housed in “the headquarters of Cardinal John O’Connor’s archdiocese”? Why wouldn’t it take up quarters in a tunnel below Penn Station?

It is impossible to separate Swomley’s paranoia from his anti-Catholicism. Indeed, the latter partly explains the former. But because not all anti-Catholics are paranoid, there is something else at work here. And that something else is called atheism. Yes, there are atheists who are not anti-Catholic, just as there are anti-Catholics who are not paranoid. But when there is a blend of atheism and anti-Catholicism, a strain of paranoia is almost always detectable.

Professor Swomley sports graduate degrees and prefers the pen to the sword. Klansmen sport white sheets and prefer the sword to the pen. Aside from that, there isn’t much that separates them, and on the scale of bigotry and paranoia, they’re twin cousins. Indeed, they have so much in common that they are likely to meet again in the next life (sorry for the bad news, professor). Exactly where I really can’t say. I just hope I don’t run into them.

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## **SOFTWARE FROM MICROSOFT TAINTED WITH PREJUDICE**

Microsoft Bookshelf 98, a software reference library, continues a pattern of prejudice against Roman Catholics that was evident in earlier versions of this software. In a search for “Catholic,” there is a subsection of quotations that lists 24 comments by public figures, past and present, on Catholicism. Fully sixteen of them are very negative remarks,

some of which are downright insulting. A check for "Protestant" turns up 7 quotations, three of which are negative statements about Protestantism (two from the same author); remarkably, there is an anti-Catholic quote in this subset. Under "Jew," there are no quotations about Jews or Judaism.

A letter registering our complaints, complete with substantiating documents, was sent to Microsoft Executive Vice President of Worldwide Sales, Stephen Balmer. William Donohue also released the following statement to the press regarding this matter:

"I don't know how much more proof skeptics need before they learn that prejudice against Catholicism is the last acceptable bias in America. To think that two-thirds of the Microsoft Bookshelf entries under 'Catholic' reveal an animus against Catholicism is startling. Readers who want to learn what radical feminists, embittered religious writers, rock stars and intellectuals think about the Roman Catholic Church won't be disappointed in accessing this software. A check under 'pope' and 'nun' demonstrate the same bias.

"It is a credit to Jews that they aren't subject to the same treatment; Catholics have a long way to go before they are afforded the same degree of respect. Fortunately, there are signs that Catholics are waking up, but it won't be anytime too soon before the corporate world shoves its bigotry back in the closet where it belongs.

"We'll register our complaint with Microsoft. Perhaps someone there with a conscience will ask whoever is to blame for this outrage to explain himself. The answer, of course, will either be truthful or a lie. Either way, we hope he gets canned."

Among the quotes we found offensive was this one by Matthew Fox: "Today's Catholic church seems to reward authoritarian personalities who are clearly ill, sexually obsessed and

unable to remember the past.”

Feminist Robin Morgan’s contribution was also noted: “Although every organized patriarchal religion works overtime to contribute its own brand of misogyny to the myth of woman-hate, woman-fear, and woman-evil, the Roman Catholic Church also carries immense power of very directly affecting women’s lives everywhere by its stand against birth control and abortion, and by its use of skillful and wealthy lobbies to prevent legislative change. It is an obscenity—an all-male hierarchy, celibate or not, that presumes to rule on the lives and bodies of millions of women.”

No Catholic-bashing compendium would be complete without a statement from the rock star, Madonna: “Catholicism is not a soothing religion. It’s a painful religion. We’re all gluttons for punishment.”

Those who would like to write to Mr. Balmer can reach him at Microsoft Corporation, One Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052-6399.

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## **VATICAN DOCUMENT ON HOLOCAUST DESERVES PRAISE**

On March 16, the Vatican issued a long awaited document, “We Remember, a Reflection on the Shoah.” It defended the role of Pope Pius XII during World War II while also acknowledging that some Roman Catholics were guilty of misdeeds. It implored Christians to abide by a “moral imperative” that will never allow for another Holocaust. No sooner had the document been released than some were crying “this isn’t enough.” The league immediately put out a news release responding to the outcry:

“Already there are those who are carping that the document doesn’t go far enough. But the Vatican was only right to defend Pope Pius XII. After all, his efforts at saving Jews was duly recognized during and after the war by such luminaries as the World Jewish Congress, the Hebrew Commission, Golda Meir, the New York Times, Albert Einstein and Emilio Zolli (Zolli was the chief rabbi in Rome at the time of the occupation who converted to Catholicism after the war and took Pius’ name as his baptismal name). Moreover, the Israeli diplomat and scholar, Pinchas Lapide, concluded his study of the Church’s response to the Holocaust by crediting the Church with saving as many as 860,000 Jews.

“Those who reflexively criticize this document should ponder the words of Robert Kempner, the American who served as deputy chief of the Nuremburg war-crimes tribunal: ‘All the arguments and writings eventually used by the Catholic Church against Hitler only provoked suicide; the execution of Jews was followed by that of Catholic priests.’ William Rubinstein, author of the new book, *The Myth of Rescue*, similarly maintains that the Church could not realistically have done more to save Jews during the war.

“To those who say that the Church could have done more, it is time to say, ‘had others done as much, more Jews would have been saved.’”

The league will have more to say about this issue in the next edition of *Catalyst*.

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## RELIGION LAW ADVANCES

On March 4, the House Judiciary Committee approved a proposed amendment to the Constitution that would allow prayer in the

schools and other forms of religious expression on public property.

William Donohue, who testified in favor of the amendment before the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the House Judiciary Committee in July, 1996, appeared on FOX News Channel to debate the issue with Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. While Donohue favored the wording of an amendment by Congressman Henry Hyde over the one by Rep. Ernest Istook, he defended the Istook amendment as being necessary to restore the status quo ante. Donohue argues that we need to return to the interpretation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment before it was redefined by the courts in a strict separationist mode.

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## **ABSOLUT AD EXPLOITS CATHOLIC SACRAMENT**

An ad by Absolut, the vodka product of Sweden, met objections from the Catholic League because it exploited the Catholic sacrament of Holy Eucharist. The ad, which appeared on p. 321 of the March issue of *Vogue*, is a story-book tale about a priest on an island. Throughout the ad, reference is made to many Catholic symbols and themes, all but one of which stays within the bounds of light humor. The Catholic League objected, however, to the statement regarding the Eucharist.

The line that the league found offensive refers to “the precious ciborium full of what looked like everybody’s least favorite EASTER candy.” The ciborium is used to hold the Communion Host.

The Catholic League’s position was spelled out for the press:

“Had Absolut left out the line about the ciborium, we would not have objected. But to refer to what Catholics believe to be the Real Presence of Jesus as nothing more than ‘everybody’s least favorite EASTER candy’ is reprehensible. And to do this during Lent is particularly offensive.

“We are letting the vodka stewards know about our objection and look for Absolut to pull the ad immediately.”

When Seagrams, which distributes Absolut in the U.S., learned of the league’s press release, it had its ad agency call William Donohue. Donohue was quite pleased to learn that once the ad finishes its run in May (the company has already committed itself to some publications), it will not be reprinted unless the artist who composed it agrees to delete the offensive line about the Eucharist. In the event the artist does not agree to this, Absolut has said that it will not run the ad ever again.

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## ANTI-CATHOLIC AD APPEARS AGAIN

Last spring, the Catholic League wrote to David Lawrence, publisher of the *Miami Herald*, asking him not to accept any more anti-Catholic ads from the Eternal Gospel SDA Church. In response, Lawrence pledged not to allow the identical ad again. To the league’s dismay, his paper ran the very same bigoted ad on February 28.

The ad is one of those dumb apocalyptic statements about “Earth’s Final Warning.” Its message is that we’re all doomed because Catholics have succeeded in enforcing a “National Sunday Law.” To which we say, if you want to work on Sunday

and observe Saturday as the Sabbath, do it. Just lay off our religion.

We wrote to Lawrence asking for an explanation and he responded by saying that he was unaware that the ad had run again. He referred us to someone else at the paper and the result of the discussion was positive: the spokesman was sincere and pledged to bring our concerns to a staff meeting that deals with the newspaper's ad policy. We fully expect, then, that our "final warning" was heeded.

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## MIRAMAX OFFERS "WIDE AWAKE"

In March, Miramax asked William Donohue if he was interested in previewing the movie, "Wide Awake." He agreed. Miramax is the Disney-owned distributor of the Catholic-bashing film, "Priest."

"Wide Awake" is a PG movie about a young boy who attends an elite Catholic boarding school. After his beloved grandfather dies, the boy questions how God could allow this to happen. The movie focuses on the boy's spiritual journey and his interactions with Sister Terry, played by Rosie O'Donnell. It is humorous and well-done.

Donohue found a few lines to be wholly unnecessary, though overall there was nothing objectionable. The movie has its endearing moments, he confessed, but when asked whether this changes his mind about Miramax, he exclaimed, "talk to me after the movie 'Dogma' comes out. From what I've read, this could be trouble."