

POSTSCRIPT ON BOB JONES

Most Catholics are aware that some Protestants still carry a deep-seated animus against their religion, and if ever there were any doubt, the Bob Jones University controversy removed them all.

It was the patriarch himself, Rev. Bob Jones, who commented in 1928 on the prospect of seeing a Catholic, Al Smith, in the White House. "I'd rather see a nigger as President" is how he put it. His son, Bob Jones II, was just like his father, calling the Catholic Church "the Mother of Harlots" and a "satanic counterfeit."

Bob Jones III is another loyal son; it was he who decided to post "the Mother of Harlots" comment, and others like them, on the Bob Jones University website in 2000. Moreover, Jones decided in February to speak directly to this issue: "If there are those who wish to charge us with being anti-Catholicism [sic], we plead guilty."

Oh, yes, Jones hastens to add that "we love the practicing Catholic." There's a catch, though. Jones and his followers are praying that the practicing Catholic "leave the false system that has enslaved his soul." Otherwise, we'll all go to hell.

This takes on special significance when we remember that on March 3, Bob Jones III announced that the school was dropping its ban on interracial dating. What this shows is that the university is more passionate about its anti-Catholicism than it's racism. We don't expect this will change anytime soon.

QUOTABLE

NBC's "Today Show" 2-28-00

MATT LAUER: So what would you say to Catholic voters who aren't quite ready to accept this apology?

DONOHUE: I'd have to ask them, what do they want? Do they want him to bend over and take a paddle right to his behind? I mean, at what point do you say enough is enough?

ABC's "World News Tonight with Peter Jennings" 3-6-00

DONOHUE: Well, McCain tried to exploit the issue. And now when Bush apologizes I think most Catholics feels like 'let's move on, we have had it with this issue.'

THE BARBARIANS ARE IN THE GATE

William A. Donohue

Last fall when the Catholic League protested the "Sensation" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, we were accused of censorship. Leading the way was Joan E. Bertin, executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship.

In the fall of 1998, Bertin got so uptight with us for protesting the Terrence McNally play, "Corpus Christi," that she not only accused us of censorship, she signed a statement—endorsed by all of New York's major artists—commending the Manhattan Theatre Club for putting on the play. Now she's back again, although this time we can

hardly hear her voice.

Bertin is a bit miffed at those who are now complaining about the Whitney Museum playing host to a trivialization of the Holocaust; a German-born artist is comparing Rudolph Giuliani to Hitler because of the New York mayor's protest of "Sensation." The "Sanitation" exhibition by Hans Haacke features a row of garbage cans that blare out the sound of marching troops and sports a wall lined with passages from Hitler that are contrasted to statements made by Giuliani and others. Bertin defends Haacke, but ever so gently.

The reason Bertin is easy on those who are railing against the Whitney is because she's on the left. In her mind, the left "is traditionally anti-authoritarian." This is odd given that the left perfected oppression, especially in the 20th century. Don't the names of Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot mean anything to her? Does she think Castro's a reform Democrat?

In any event, what Bertin will not do is write a statement in support of the Whitney for braving the "censors" at the ADL who oppose "Sanitation" and then get every single major artist in New York to sign it. But that's exactly what she did when the Catholic League protested "Corpus Christi"—she got the arts establishment to sign a statement in support of the Manhattan Theatre Club and against the Catholic League.

In other words, when we exercise our First Amendment right to freedom of speech by calling attention to works of art that offend us, we are barbarians at the gate who must be stopped. Now what do you think would be the reaction among elites if real barbarism took place? Let me rephrase this: what would be the reaction among elites if the barbarians were those "anti-authoritarian" ones on the left? I won't keep you guessing for long.

Consider what happened recently in Montreal, as reported in Canada's newest national daily, the *National Post*, and

the *Montreal Gazette*.

On March 7, 15 people wearing ski masks spray-painted graffiti with the words "Religion—A Trap for Fools" on a pillar outside Mary Queen of the World Cathedral in downtown Montreal. Inside, they painted "No God, no masters" on one of the altars. They overturned flowerpots and stuck sanitary napkins—some soiled—to pictures and walls. Condoms were thrown around the cathedral, the missal was stolen and hundreds of hymn and prayer books were destroyed. There was an attempt to overthrow the tabernacle as well.

The group, Collectif Autonome Féministe, was celebrating International Women's Day in Montreal, and when they barged into the church they cursed religion and said they were claiming the right to abortion and freedom of speech. In a written statement, they denounced the Catholic Church's teachings on abortion, homosexuality and sex education. They were not charged with a hate crime because the authorities concluded that there wasn't enough evidence to make the charge stick. So they were charged with "unlawful assembly."

What is absolutely amazing is that one week after this outbreak of fascism, not one U.S. newspaper reported on what happened, though the *New York Times* did run a story on March 14 on the controversy in Quebec over whether Pokemon cards should be issued in French.

Moreover, AP ran a story on March 8, 1999, on a synagogue that was vandalized in Siberia, but said nothing about the March 7, 2000 desecration of the Montreal church. But AP did address another issue in Montreal on March 14: the story was entitled "U.S. Files Complaint against European Union on Jet Mufflers."

In Montreal at least, the barbarians are inside the gate. What's worse is that the media in the U.S. and Canada could care less. But if vandals hit a synagogue in Siberia, that's news.

In this topsy-turvy world of political correctness, Catholics who protest anti-Catholicism are censors, and feminist fascists who use Nazi-like tactics to terrorize a Catholic church are guilty of “unlawful assembly.” So now you know what the reaction of elites would be if the left engaged in barbarism. Nothing. Surprised?

THE JUBILEE YEAR ‘REQUEST FOR PARDON’

On Sunday, March 12, 2000 Pope John Paul II made a unique and historic “request for pardon” for the sins and errors of Christians both throughout the centuries and in the present. This papal act of atonement for past sin is meant to Christians to enter the new millenium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith.

Unfortunately, we live at a time where Truth is rarely recognized. The spiritual nature of this public confession made by the pope for the entire Church was misconstrued, misunderstood and twisted to meet political or ideological agendas of those who are hostile to the Church. There have been public responses to the papal apology that confuse repentance for wrong actions with accusations of doctrinal error, or make demands for apologies not required in the historical or cultural context of the events of the past.

The negative secular response to the papal apology can be summed up in an editorial in the March 14, 2000 *New York Times*: “As long as (the Church) was burdened by its failure to reckon with passed misdeeds committed in the name of Catholicism, the Church could not fully heal its relations

with other faiths. John Paul has now made it easier to do that. Some of the things (the pope) did not say bear note. The apology was expressed in broad terms. It was offered on behalf of the church's 'sons and daughters' but not the church itself, which is considered holy. Nor did John Paul directly address the sensitive issue of whether past popes, cardinals and clergy – not just parishioners – also erred. The pope's apology for discrimination against women is welcome but difficult to square with his continued opposition to abortion and birth control, and to women in the priesthood. Regrettably, he made no mention of discrimination against homosexuals. Another noted omission was the lack of a specific reference to the Holocaust...(and) the failure of Pope Pius XII to speak out against the Nazi genocide."

Let's review these charges:

As long as it was burdened by its failure to reckon with past misdeeds committed in the name of Catholicism, the Church could not fully heal its relations with other faiths.

This is a misunderstanding of the purpose of the papal apology. The purpose of the papal atonement for past sin is to allow Christians to enter the new millenium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith. In the *Times* statement there is a direct implication of a one-sided nature to the wrongs of the past, an acceptance of an anti-Catholic interpretation of history rooted in post-Reformation and Enlightenment propaganda rather than an accurate and objective understanding of the past. Additionally, while the papal apology is certainly given without equivocation, "it would also be desirable if these acts of repentance would stimulate the members of other religions to acknowledge the faults of their own past."

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The *Times* and other commentators failed to note that the pope

has specifically addressed many of the issues which the apology outlined in general. As outlined in a recent analysis by Catholic News Service, in 1982, the pope referred to the "errors of excess" in the Inquisition; the 1998 Vatican document on the Shoah made clear the moral shortcomings within Christians that contributed to the Holocaust; in 1995, the pope, in discussing the Crusades, outlined errors and expressed thanks that dialogue has replaced violence; the pope decried in a 1995 letter the historical discrimination against women and expressed regret that "not a few" members of the Church shared in the blame. The *Times* and other commentators demand a laundry list of apologies based on prejudicial interpretations of history. While the pope "forgives and asks forgiveness," there is no similar acknowledgment on the part of these commentators of the biases, conceits and hatreds that often driven their commentaries on the Church. While the pope's apology asks for no recipocrity, it would do well for institutions such as the *Times* to examine objectively its own motivations in its attacks on the Church and the historical prejudices in which they are rooted.

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This is a two-fold misunderstanding. First, there is a real distinction between a theological understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, which is holy, and its members that are sinners. Second, the *Times* and other critics are making the common mistake of identifying "the Church" with the hierarchy. "Sons and daughters" of the Church refers to all baptized members of the Church, not "just parishioners."

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The papal apology dealt with errors rooted in failure to live out the demands of the Gospels in particular historical circumstances. The *Times* and other critics are confusing repentance for certain wrong actions in history with admissions of doctrinal error. The *Times* uses the papal apology as an opportunity to demand that the Church change doctrinal truths for a secular agenda. What the apology could not be, and was not intended to be, was an apology for Church doctrine. Part of the apology, however, was for any inadvertent cooperation Christians may have given that allowed the persistence in our own time of a culture of death that allows the weak and defenseless, particularly the unborn, to be abused at the hands of the powerful.

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The papal apology was not meant as an endorsement of a contemporary ideological agenda. The apology makes clear that no person should be subject to discrimination and if any in the Christian community cooperate in discrimination, they are in error. However, the Church has always taught that homosexual acts – not homosexuals – are inherently sinful. The *Times* implies that such teaching involves “discrimination against homosexuals.” It does not. Again, the *Times* demands admission of doctrinal error and that Church teaching succumb to an ideological agenda. Such is neither the sum nor substance of the papal apology.

Another noted omission was the lack of a specific reference to the Holocaust

As the recent document on the Shoah made clear, the Holocaust was “the result of the pagan ideology of Nazism, animated by a merciless anti-Semitism that not only despised the faith of the Jewish people, but also denied their very human dignity. Nevertheless, ‘it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices

imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts.’” The papal apology strongly asserts that “Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people of the covenant.” However, it would be an unhistorical leap for the pope to assent to contemporary anti-Catholic propaganda that attempts to identify the Church with the Holocaust. It is a historical fallacy – and an insult to the memory of the Holocaust – to use this ultimate 20th century evil as a tool for anti-Catholic rhetoric and to thereby mitigate the evil that was pagan Nazism.

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The alleged “failure” of Pope Pius XII “to speak out on Nazi genocide” is a faulty interpretation of both the historical reality and a papacy that saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. The actions and tactics of Pope Pius XII and the Church saved far more Jewish lives than the Allied armies, Allied governments, the Resistance, the Red Cross, other churches and other religions, or any then-existing agency of any kind worldwide combined during the war. The actions of Pius XII hardly need an apology.

The difficulty in such an unprecedented event by Pope John Paul II is that too often history is clouded with the prejudices of those commenting and reporting on it. As evidenced in the *Times* editorial what is assumed to be objective historical understanding of events is often 19th century – and 20th century – anti-Catholic propaganda that has been sanctioned over time as objectively correct. It is conventional wisdom, not historical fact. Careful and objective analysis – free from the prejudices of the past and present – needs to guide our understanding of history.

The Church “is not afraid of the truth that emerges from history and is ready to acknowledge mistakes whenever they have been identified, especially when they involve the respect

that is owed to individuals and communities. She is inclined to mistrust generalizations that excuse or condemn various historical periods. She entrusts the investigation of the past to patient, honest, scholarly reconstruction, free from confessional or ideological prejudices, regarding both the accusations brought against her and the wrongs she has suffered." (*Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, International Theological Commission, December 1999).

Pope John Paul II's historic act of atonement is a witness to guide Catholics into the third millenium. Bigoted commentary, historical distortion, demands for doctrinal abandonment, and anti-Catholic prejudice will not detract from the this unprecedented jubilee "request for pardon."

ANTI-CATHOLICISM BECOMES AN ELECTION ISSUE

The recent flap over the Bob Jones University appearance by Governor George W. Bush has been the source of much controversy. The Catholic League's position on this important issue needs to be understood by all our members.

The Catholic League criticized Bush for his appearance at the school, defended him against the charge of anti-Catholicism, accepted his apology, criticized Senator John McCain for exploiting the issue and noted the hypocrisy of those Democrats who just now discovered anti-Catholicism.

We are well aware that Ronald Reagan and George Bush visited Bob Jones University when running for president. The governor of South Carolina, a Democrat, also visited the school.

McCain's point man in South Carolina, Lindsey Graham, received an honorary doctorate from the university. So it appeared as though there was nothing unusual about George W. Bush's visit.

However, there were two things about his visit that were different: a) it came at a time—2000—when the public is more sensitive to the issue of anti-Catholicism than it has been in some time (many pundits have credited this to the Catholic League) and b) he kicked off his campaign in South Carolina there, and thereby sent a message to Catholics that, no matter how unintended, was regrettable. We took note of this last point in a news release of February 10.

On February 11, the *New York Times* published a letter by Bill Donohue that agreed with columnist Bob Herbert for taking Bush to task for his Bob Jones University rally. Donohue noted that on the school's website, they carry an article that brands the Catholic Church "a satanic counterfeit," an "ecclesiastic tyranny" and "the Mother of Harlots." The Catholic League president explained that "It is one thing to maintain theological disagreements, but quite another to disparage another religion. Those seeking public office should never genuflect toward those who embrace the latter."

Unfortunately, in the immediate aftermath of Bush's February 2 campaign stop at Bob Jones University, he and his supporters failed to address the school's anti-Catholicism, though they did not hesitate to condemn the institution's ban on interracial dating. This provoked the Catholic League to step up its criticism of Bush.

For example, on February 13, Bush was prodded by Tim Russert on "Meet the Press" to comment on the school's anti-Catholicism and the best he could do was to say, "I don't associate with the thought. First of all, that was a 1982 quote by a man now passed away." He did not mention that the anti-Catholic quote is flagged on the school's web page in 2000, along with several other bigoted statements.

On February 15, when given a chance to comment on this during his presidential debate on CNN, Bush let the opportunity go. On February 17, he told CNN "I support people from all walks of life being able to date," but said nothing about the school's anti-Catholicism.

On February 13, on "Face the Nation," Bush supporter Pat Robertson addressed the school's racism, but not its anti-Catholicism. Bush supporter Haley Barbour on February 16 on "Crossfire" never condemned the school's anti-Catholicism when the subject came up. On February 16, Bush supporter Rep. Jennifer Dunn on "Hannity and Colmes" followed suit, as she did again the next night on "Hardball."

Bush supporter Rep. J.C. Watts spoke against the school's racism on CNN's "Early Edition" on February 16 and did the same thing on February 17 on "Hardball" without ever addressing the school's anti-Catholicism. Bush supporter Rep. Tim Hutchinson, and his Bush-supporting brother Rep. Asa Hutchinson, in an AP story on February 16 spoke against the school's position on race, but said nothing about the school's anti-Catholicism.

At this point, the Catholic League issued the following statement to the press: "The evidence is in: Bush and his friends find it difficult to condemn the anti-Catholicism that marks Bob Jones University. We need to know why."

If Bush got nervous after he lost the New Hampshire primary to McCain, it was McCain who panicked after losing South Carolina to Bush. The Arizona senator now sought to exploit the issue by authorizing and paying for a flood of phone calls to Republican voters in Michigan, the next primary stop. The "Catholic Voter Alert" phone messages labeled McCain "a friend of Catholics," informing voters of Bush's visit to the anti-Catholic school in South Carolina.

When the McCain camp was asked about these phone messages,

they denied having anything to do with them. Bush, however, charged McCain with being behind them. This led Donohue to criticize both the phone calls and Bush; it was “wrong to accuse the McCain camp of orchestrating these phone calls when he now admits he lacks the evidence,” Donohue told the media.

But then the next day, the *New York Times*, on February 23, broke the story that McCain had indeed promoted the phone calls. The outright distortions that McCain and his staff then engaged in only added to the problem. This led Donohue to lambaste McCain and his campaign manager, Rick Davis, for deceiving the public.

Appearing on several national TV shows, Donohue continued to criticize McCain and his supporters for maintaining that the phone calls were not meant to accuse Bush of anti-Catholicism; McCain said they were simply meant to remind voters that Bush had gone to the anti-Catholic school. But Donohue wasn't buying it: this was no FYI (for your information) educational memo, he said. This was demagoguery—an attempt to intimidate voters into voting against Bush.

On February 24, Donohue was asked by Ollie North and Paul Begala on MSNBC-TV's “Equal Time” what Bush needed to do to put this issue behind him. Donohue replied that Bush had to do two things: a) stop with the “apple pie rhetoric” about how he opposes anti-Catholicism and instead speak directly to the Bob Jones appearance and b) apologize to Catholics for unwittingly offending their sensibilities. The next day Bush wrote a letter to John Cardinal O'Connor that did just that.

The Bush letter was written on Friday, February 25, but it was not made public until it was received by the New York Archbishop; a copy was also sent to Donohue. On Sunday evening, February 26, Donohue was contacted by the *Today Show*: they wanted him on TV the next morning to discuss the apology. He agreed and accepted the apology. At the end of the interview, Donohue took the occasion to tell host Matt Lauer

that we should now focus on Al Gore's Buddhist temple visit and discuss why some of Gore's friends in Hollywood produce movies that attack Catholicism (Harvey Weinstein of Miramax is a big Gore contributor).

In a statement released to the media, Donohue said "A touchstone of Catholicism is forgiveness, the recognition that wrongdoers who are sorry for their offense should be forgiven. It would be inconsistent with our faith, therefore, if we as Catholics did not forgive Gov. Bush for this incident." Robert Novak, on CNN's *Crossfire*, held up the league's new release and read this portion on TV.

This issue was no sooner over when McCain labeled Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell "the forces of evil." This was quickly denounced by the Catholic League for trivializing the meaning of evil. "Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot were evil," we said.

Because some Democrats were making hay with this issue, we took the opportunity to issue a news release, "Democrats Discover Anti-Catholicism." We chastised the Clinton administration for giving us Dr. Jocelyn Elders in 1993 as Surgeon General and James Hormel in 1999 as Ambassador to Luxembourg. Elders has made many anti-Catholic remarks and Hormel gave his approval to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Some Democrats have also exploited the league's criticism of those Republicans responsible for the House Chaplain mess. Never before have we gotten such fast friends, we told the media. However, we cannot let the prospect of opportunism stop us from doing what is right, and that is why it is important for us to keep focused and not get pulled into political squabbles.

The Catholic League has no favorite in the election and will continue to scrutinize the comments of all candidates for

public office. It is our sincere hope that religious baiting will end so that the issues most Americans care about—moral values, education, health care, military readiness—will get the attention they deserve.

WHITNEY MUSEUM—MODEL OF HYPOCRISY

On March 23, New York's Whitney Museum hosted "Sanitation" by Hans Haacke. The German-born artist was provided with a platform to denounce Mayor Rudolph Giuliani for criticizing the "Sensation" exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art last fall. In the exhibition, Nazi-style script is used to highlight critical comments made by Giuliani and others; they are juxtaposed with the words of the First Amendment.

The Catholic League wasted no time going public with a response:

"'In 1993, *New York Times* writer Holland Cotter chastised those who seriously equated grant refusals by the National Endowment for the Arts with censorship in Nazi Germany. They 'should be off somewhere doing the most basic historical research,' he wrote. Cotter was referring to the controversy over the Whitney display 'Abject Art,' an exhibition that featured depictions of excrement, a film showing one man pushing his head into another man's rectum, a photo of an artist with a bullwhip in his rectum, etc. The same disability is now at work again.

"The surest way for fascism to win is to destroy the moral bedrock of a democratic society. That is why Haacke is disingenuous: not only is he wrong in painting Giuliani a

fascist—he had the guts to challenge the bigots—Haacke’s work is seed for the very ideology he claims to deplore.

“Haacke is a phony. In the early 1990s, he blasted art patron Charles Saatchi for doing business in South Africa, but now he lays off Charlie Hustle for sponsoring ‘Sensation,’ even though Saatchi pimped his way into the museum. That’s because Haacke’s tolerance for Catholic bashing is infinitely greater than his tolerance for racial segregation.

“The Whitney is also a phony. Two years ago it was charged with censorship for canceling ‘The Great American Nude,’ and now it takes great umbrage at those who criticize blasphemy and pornography.”

The Whitney was properly criticized for trivializing the Holocaust experience; the ADL was particularly offended. Also, Mrs. Marylou Whitney, the widow of Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, withdrew her financial support of the museum and resigned from its fund-raising council. She said that her mother-in-law, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, “would roll over in her grave” if she knew how debased the museum had become.

This example shows the extent to which left politics is engulfed in the artistic community. It also goes to show once again that the term art has been emptied of significance.

GOOD FRIDAY HOLIDAY UPHELD (AGAIN)

In January, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a challenge to a Maryland law that mandates Good Friday as a holiday in the

public schools. On March 6, it followed suit by allowing Indiana to give state employees the day off; the justices did not comment on why they refused to hear an appeal that argued the holiday was a violation of the First Amendment.

The Catholic League addressed the court decision with a statement to the media:

“The high court’s decision not to hear a challenge to the right of Indiana to declare Good Friday a holiday is welcome, but it would have been preferable to accept the case and then deal directly with the faulty reasoning of the appeals court that reached the right conclusion. The appeals court maintained that ‘Indiana does not celebrate the religious aspects of Good Friday,’ holding that the holiday ‘has absolutely no religious significance.’ Instead, the appeals court noted, Good Friday just happens to fall in the middle of ‘the long vacationless spring—a day when employees should take off to rejuvenate themselves.’

“This is intellectually dishonest. The purpose of treating Good Friday as a holiday is to allow for the reverential commemoration of the crucifixion of Christ. Almost 9 in 10 Americans are Christian, thus it could be said that not to allow the states this prerogative would be to show an hostility to religion that is unacceptable. What the states are doing is accommodating religion—they are not sponsoring anything.

“The justices on the appeals court acted cowardly. Indeed, they demonstrated that they need a few days off so that they can rejuvenate themselves. A trip to the Holy Land might do them wonders.”

FLAWED SURVEY

In March, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an excellent series on the 2000 electorate that compiled some of the best data we've seen. In particular, we would like to cite the *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll that was done on Catholics and Fundamentalists by the polling organization Peter D. Hart and Robert M. Teeter; it appeared on March 9.

There was one problem, however, with the poll. In the box insert that accompanied the story, it cited the category "Society's Acceptance of Homosexuality." It listed 42 percent of all voters answering "Have gone too far," with 36 percent of Catholics and 60 percent of Fundamentalists answering this way. To the answer "Have not gone far enough," 41 percent of all voters agreed, with 47 percent of Catholics and 27 percent of Fundamentalists answering this way.

Referring to this data, the story said "Catholics are more supportive of saying they want to end discrimination against homosexuals than are non-Catholics."

We were confused. Homosexuality refers to the sexual behavior of homosexuals, having nothing to do with discrimination against homosexuals as persons. When we called for clarification we were told that the flaw we picked up was unfortunately true. But as it turns out it wasn't the newspaper that was at fault, it was the polling company.

The actual question as asked of respondents was: "Which better describes your impression about society's acceptance of homosexuality: a) Acceptance has gone too far or b) Has not gone far enough in ending discrimination."

It is easy to see how misleading this all is. For example, it is not at all inconsistent for someone to hold that discrimination against homosexual persons is unwarranted, yet at the same time hold that homosexuality is not something that

society needs to affirm. Unfortunately, this critical distinction is often lost on those who simply package status and behavior as if they are one.

The Catholic Church, it needs to be said, has long recognized the difference and that is why the Catholic League takes umbrage with pundits who try to paint the Church anti-gay.

“EARLY SHOW” GETS TOO CUTE WITH CATHOLICISM

On the March 7 edition of the CBS program, the “Early Show,” co-hosts Bryant Gumbel and Jane Clayson joined meteorologist Mark McEwen in an extended ridicule of Catholicism. The subject was Lent.

During the course of the conversation, Gumbel and McEwen admitted they were raised Catholic but were no longer practicing. “I was born Catholic and I got a problem with it,” said McEwen. His problem is that the Church is not inclusive enough for him; he specifically cited gays as a group that is excluded. Then there were the proverbial jokes about Catholics not eating meat on Fridays, etc.

On January 31, it was co-host Julie Chen who chimed in with weatherman McEwen making jokes about Catholic guilt, nuns “ready to take you out” and “being scarred for life,” saying Hail Marys, etc.

The Catholic League commented as follows to the press:

“The ‘Early Show’ is getting too cute with its discussions of Catholicism. Besides showing their ignorance, Gumbel, Clayson,

Chen and McEwen display a troubling double standard: they are ever so careful how they talk about other segments of society. To the refrain that their morning banter is harmless, we suggest they choose another target and then explain to the offended group how innocent their light-hearted fare really is. African Americans, WASPS and Asians would be our recommendation.”

ONCE WAS ENOUGH

Last year, on the day before St. Patrick’ Day, Planned Parenthood of Connecticut distributed green condoms at the state Capitol in Hartford. The condoms read, “Kiss Me I’m Irish,” “Put on the Green” and “Four Leaf Clover.” In stepped state senators and the Catholic League to protest, causing a ruckus. The league’s press release was entitled, “The Bigots at Planned Parenthood.”

On the off chance that the bigots would repeat, we called the offices of Planned Parenthood in Connecticut the week before the march. When we asked if they were planning to do it again, we were told that “it got out of hand last year and was not representative of their work.” Once, it appears, was enough.

Remember this the next time someone criticizes the Catholic League for being too tough. It is not likely that Planned Parenthood would have backed off this year had it not been for the heat they got last year.