

# CANDY CANE CONTROVERSY

Passing out colored condoms on high school grounds is less controversial than religious-themed candy canes. That's what we've concluded after examining the controversy at Westfield High School in western Massachusetts.

Last December, six students from Westfield distributed 450 pieces of candy to fellow classmates. The candy canes contained notes declaring the J shape stood for Jesus and red and white stripes symbolized Christ's blood and purity. They were immediately threatened with suspension, and on January 2 were told they had to serve a one-day suspension. Their crime? Violating separation of church and state. Their response? A lawsuit.

The candy-cane distributing students got a boost recently when a new regulation issued by the U.S. Department of Education provided a list of students' rights that the authorities must respect. Among those rights is the right to pray in school, etc. Lawyers for the students were heartened by the news. They are invoking it in their brief, which seeks to get the U.S. District Court in Springfield to throw out their suspensions and allow them to distribute religious material on school grounds.

Things are looking up for the students as the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a friend-of-the-court brief on their side. Now had the students only settled for distributing condoms, the anti-religious cops wouldn't have uttered a word. Such is the state of freedom and morality in America today.

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# CENSURE GRANTED

In last month's *Catalyst*, there was a story on the antics of Hightstown, New Jersey councilman Eugene Sarafin. Twice Sarafin had used obscenities to describe his Catholic critics. We called for his censure and on March 3 it was granted.

After writing to all of Sarafin's colleagues urging censure, Council President Nancy Walker-Laudenberger introduced a resolution publicly censuring Sarafin's remarks. The motion passed 5-1; Sarafin was the lone dissenter.

We are pleased that these lawmakers took their responsibilities seriously, and we hope to never hear about Sarafin ever again.

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# AP SHOWS CLASS

It really rubs us the wrong way whenever we experience anti-Catholic bias of a gratuitous nature. And we see a lot of this kind of needless and care-free expressions of Catholic bashing. A story we recently read is a case in point.

The story revolved around a series of strip joints down south called Sammy's strip clubs. It provided all sorts of detail about the multi-million dollar enterprise, including one piece of information that hardly seemed to fit: the identification of the strip club owner's religion.

"The naked truth is surprising: A chain of Deep South strip joints is run by a one-time Catholic schoolgirl from Alabama." That's the way reporter Leigh Anne Monitor began her story in the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, a prominent Alabama newspaper.

This little nugget of info had absolutely nothing to do with the story, yet it was gratuitously cited anyway.

What bothered the Catholic League most of all was the fact that the Associated Press (AP) picked up the story and ran it on the Alabama state wire for use in other newspapers in the state. William Donohue promptly registered a complaint with an AP official, Mike Silverman, asking him to explain why it was necessary for AP to report that the woman went to a Catholic school. Donohue asked, "How is this fact relevant to an article about a strip club?"

We are happy to say that Mr. Silverman acted responsibly by agreeing that the reference to Catholic school was gratuitous. He regretted that AP let this get by and explained that it was actually in violation of AP policy to do this. Donohue then commended Silverman for his response by saying this decision proves that "AP is a class organization."

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## **KISSLING ON CAMPUS**

A pro-abortion group at Williams College, an elite institution in Massachusetts, has invited Catholics for a Free Choice president Frances Kissling to speak during Holy Week. William Donohue wrote a letter to Williams College President Morton Owen Shapiro expressing his concerns.

Donohue identified Kissling as an anti-Catholic who fraudulently uses the term "Catholic" as a cover for her bigotry. Donohue's request of the president was to denounce Kissling for the bigot she is. We are awaiting a response and may consider other avenues to protest her presence on campus.

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## NO REPLY

There's a club in Washington D.C. called "Between Friends" that likes to host after-hours dance parties for homosexuals. It recently decided to throw a party called "Sunday Mass." An advertisement for the event showed a picture of Christ with the inscription, "Get on your knees, say your prayers, and beg because, boi...God has spoken."

We wrote the proprietor wanting to know whether he has plans to host a Jewish or Muslim service, but he hasn't replied. Somehow we think we'll never hear from this guy. We just hope he got our point.

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## WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

Call to Action bills itself as a progressive lay Catholic organization. It rejects the Church's teachings on sexuality and other matters, but it nonetheless maintains it is a loyal Catholic group. Though it has the support of some bishops, it would not be surprising if Cardinal Adam Maida, Archbishop of Detroit, and Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Virginia, are wondering, "with friends like these who needs enemies?"

The Detroit chapter of Call to Action is planning many protests this spring. All the demonstrations will protest the exclusion of women from the priesthood. Among its ventures, there will be a demonstration at the rededication of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral. The blessing of the Church's oils will also be an occasion for a demonstration, as will the

ordination of the next class of seminarians. A billboard advocating women's ordination will be posted just a few blocks away from the renovated cathedral, the home church of Cardinal Maida.

Call to Action in Arlington, Virginia, is seeking to bankrupt the diocese. It is urging a boycott of the Arlington Diocese's annual Lenten appeal. It says it is not satisfied with Bishop Loverde's reaction to the sex abuse scandal. Call to Action wants area Catholics to clip a coupon that says "Zero Dollars" and mail it to the diocese's Lenten appeal.

Catholics for a Free Choice is not a Catholic organization and it has twice been condemned by the bishops as a fraud. But this hasn't stopped its leader, Frances Kissling, from selling herself as a Catholic. What is striking about Kissling these days is that she has finally said something nice about Pope John Paul II, though her insincerity is obvious.

Kissling, like most on the left of the political spectrum, is opposed to the war against Iraq. More than that, Kissling and her ilk find it much more difficult to say anything bad about Saddam Hussein than about George W. Bush. That she has taken to praising Pope John Paul II for failing to support the war shows how utterly shameless the woman is.

On CNN's "Crossfire," Kissling said, "I think the Vatican tends to see things in humanitarian ways." How sweet. Maybe now she'll begin to discover the humanity of unborn babies and start protesting child abuse in the womb.

It was nice to hear Kissling say "the Vatican is a voice for peace." Too bad she doesn't agree with Mother Teresa that nothing destroys peace more than abortion. It was also fun listening to her discover the wisdom of papal authority. In a defense of the pope, she offered, "Religious authority also has legitimate authority." Now if only she meant what she said, we might have cause to celebrate.

The Interfaith Alliance is a rag-tag bunch of religious leaders that have a problem with religion. Their latest target is "In God We Trust." They are incensed that some lawmakers in Colorado want to see our national motto on plaques in every public school in the state. One of those objecting to this initiative is Sister Maureen McCormack of the Sisters of Loretto. "I want to know in whose God we are trusting," she said. One is tempted to say, "Yours," but that would no doubt be rejected as hopelessly chauvinistic. Better to have the god of some indigenous band of tribal warriors—that might win Sister Maureen over.

Another group that makes us wonder is Voice of the Faithful. Those who belong to the group are Catholics upset with the sex abuse scandal; they seek a greater voice for the laity. What made us sit up and take notice recently was the reaction of some of their Long Island members to a miscreant priest. They defended him and blasted those Catholics who exposed him.

It seems that Rev. Charles Papa has visited hundreds of pornographic websites. He has been accused of accessing child pornography, though he disputes this. In any event, when some parishioners found out about his porn hobby, in textbook Voice of the Faithful fashion, they contacted the authorities. And who rushed to his defense? Why the high priests of "zero tolerance," Voice of the Faithful.

As one of its most active members put it, "he [Father Papa] is a human being and a loving, sharing, giving, kind priest. Although porn is not how we want priests to spend their time, let the one without sin throw the first stone."

To understand the behavior of Voice of the Faithful, it is important to know that Rev. Papa supported church members for founding a local chapter of the group last summer. He has also been criticized by parishioners for his dissidence and rejection of certain Church practices. Had he been orthodox, his defenders might have taken a different tact. So much for

Voice of the Faithful's commitment to principles.

One more example of this group's affinity for politics was demonstrated in March when the Greater Philadelphia chapter admitted lobbying the papal nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, on the right of the laity to help select the next bishop of Philadelphia (Cardinal Bevilacqua will soon be retiring). It would be neater, and surely a lot quicker, if Voice simply detailed those areas of ecclesiastical life it isn't interested in controlling.

So if these are some of our friends these days, we don't look forward to meeting our enemies.

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## JUST DESERTS

It's not the first time we've read about trouble coming to those who have previously offended us, but this time it's big news: both Disney/Miramax and WNEW are experiencing their share of difficulties these days. We say it's just deserts.

Miramax, a Disney subsidiary, has produced several anti-Catholic movies over the years— so much so that we've pressed Disney chief Michael Eisner to dump Miramax head Harvey Weinstein. Now it seems it's Weinstein who wants to dump Eisner.

Miramax is in its glory these days as one movie after another has done extremely well at the box office. Weinstein's operation is said to be worth \$3 billion. On the other hand, Disney has been going through some rough times for years. Weinstein has brought in 40 of Disney's 44 Oscar nominations this year and he wants out. He says Eisner is gypping him out of his fair share of the profits. An attempt by Weinstein to

buy out Disney's Miramax share was rejected by Eisner.

WNEW is the New York radio station that made national news when it broadcast a live sex romp from St. Patrick's Cathedral last summer. The Catholic League led a major protest and the result was that the show's hosts, Opie and Anthony, were fired. This, however, was only the beginning: the station has been floundering ever since.

The station was once known as the nation's number-one carrier of rock music. According to an article in posted on CNN.com, "The venerable station has gone from free-form to free fall, barely registering an Arbitron rating and dumping its most recent format—talk—last month." In short, with Opie and Anthony off the air, WNEW hasn't figured out a way to keep what's left of its audience.

Disney/Miramax and WNEW both tangled with the Catholic League and lost. Maybe that's because we're getting a little help from a source unknown to these guys.

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## **PHIL DONAHUE AND ROSIE O'DONNELL ON DISPLAY**

The February 24 edition of "Donahue" (MSNBC) featured an interview of Rosie O'Donnell by host Phil Donahue. The segment ended with an extended conversation on Catholicism.

In discussing the sex abuse scandal in the Church, O'Donnell said: "And you know what? It needs to be out in the forefront. I really hope that the Catholic Church gets sued until the end of time. Maybe, you know, we can melt down some of the gold toilets in the pope's Vatican and pay off some of the lawsuits because, you know, frankly, the whole tenet of Christianity,



of being pious, of living a Christ-like life, has been lost in Catholicism, I believe.”

William Donohue couldn't resist offering his own analysis to the media. Here it is:

“Well, you know, there is something about two aging and embittered Irish Catholics that is so, well, you know, embarrassing.

“We learned a lot from Rosie last night and none of it was endearing. Here is a grown woman crediting Oprah Winfrey with ‘teaching America how to have feelings and how to grieve.’ Prior to Oprah we just sulked. Now we all bleed. Then there was the exchange she had with Phil laughing heartily about those times of yesteryear when their parents scrubbed the house before the Monsignor popped by for a visit. Now their houses are a filthy mess as not even a deacon will drop by.

“To hear Rosie proclaim that the Church should not be exempt ‘from the laws of nature and God’ was quite a treat, especially given that her ideas on the subject strike some as being intrinsically disordered these days. Equally perverse is her comment on the gold toilets in the Vatican: she must be thinking about where she last sat when visiting her grieving friends in Hollywood.”

“Well, you know, it's a shame that this close to St. Patrick's Day two deracinated Irish Catholics should find the need to vent on national television. Talk about reality TV—these two are not to be believed.”

As it turned out, this was the very last show Phil Donahue did. MSNBC cancelled the show due to poor ratings.

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# LETTERS

*Vanity Fair*

April 2003

## **The Great Debate, Continued: Christopher Hitchens, Catholic League hero?...**

Rarely is there an article on abortion worth reading anymore. That's because both sides are so utterly predictable that it's a waste of time. Christopher Hitchens's contribution, however, is the exception to the rule ["Fetal Distraction," February]. As one who has sparred with him before, I commend Hitchens for his courage and honesty in dealing with this most divisive of issues.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights  
New York, New York

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*Newsday*

February 21, 2003

## **Murphy's Not to Blame**

There is not a single Catholic I know who is not angry, hurt and dismayed by the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. There is never an excuse for molesting minors and it is even worse when those in positions of authority turn a blind eye to it. But it is also true that nothing justifies unfair accusations.

Closer to home, the reaction against Bishop William Murphy of the Rockville Centre Diocese has been incredibly unfair. The problem on Long Island must be put squarely on the doorstep of Bishop John McGann. Murphy is to blame for none of the

problem: 100 percent of it goes to McGann. And that is why it is so obscene to hear people calling for Murphy to resign. He may still have to defend his record in Boston, but on Long Island the verdict is in: He's innocent.

Not only is Murphy innocent, he moved with dispatch to get rid of problem priests. Let me be specific. We all know now that the Rev. Brian McKeon was a serial molester. Under McGann, he was promoted to pastor of St. Anne's in Garden City. Under Murphy, he was bounced: Murphy took over in September 2001 and, in November, McKeon was gone.

No doubt McGann had his reasons for keeping such priests and it is not my intention to impugn his motives. It is my intention to say that whatever good reasons he had, he, like some other bishops, exercised flawed judgment in this regard.

To blame Murphy for any of this is irresponsible. If anything, he put in place a team of professionals led by an exemplary priest, Father Bob Batule, to deal squarely with this issue.

Finally, it is not the bishops of New York who are holding up a mandatory reporting law in New York State—it is Family Planning Advocates (the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood) and the New York Civil Liberties Union. They are opposed to blanketing everyone because they are interested in shielding abortion providers from reporting cases of statutory rape. Would that Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota would get on board with the bishops in insisting that there be no exemptions; instead, he wants the law to apply only to the clergy.

There are lots of reasons to be angry but no amount of it justifies trashing the innocent. The evidence shows that almost all priests have had absolutely nothing to do with the scandal; it also shows that Murphy's role on Long Island has been to tackle what he inherited.

In short, before anyone further hyperventilates over the

“crisis,” let’s not forget that most of our priests are good men and that Long Island’s bishop is doing what he can to move forward.

William A. Donohue

*Editor’s note: The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Manhattan*

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*The American Conservative*

March 10, 2003

### **Drawing Distinctions**

Jeremy Lott (Feb. 10) claims that the Catholic League uses the same tactics as CAIR. That may be true in some instances but the examples he cited are poor. The Catholic League does not issue “frequent alerts to elicit comments and money from supporters.” Six times a year we ask our members for a donation to pay for a specific project.

Do we “demonize” our opponents? We fight back against those who bash the Church, but it is not easy to see how this amounts to “demonizing.” Regarding the charge of our “slipshod use of polling,” we don’t poll. Finally, do we “elevate small tiffs into a national outrage”? That’s quite subjective: when we got “Opie and Anthony” fired for broadcasting a description of a couple having sex in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, we weren’t elevating anything—we were simply responding to an outrageous condition.

In short, it is tricky business to lump all anti-defamation organizations together.

William Donohue

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*Reason*

March 2003

## **E Pluribus Umbrage**

Tim Cavanaugh, author of "E Pluribus Umbrage" (December), finds it amusing that in the midst of the church's priest scandal, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights "alerted its 300,000 members to a grave threat to the faith: a King of the Hill episode in which cartoon housewife Peggy impersonates a nun."

This makes it sound as if we object to Sister Act portrayals, but anyone who has really followed the Catholic League knows this is bunk. Our objection to this episode was the vile way in which the Eucharist was treated. Cavanaugh omits this because it would interfere with the point he wants to make.

On a more important note, Cavanaugh says that our petition to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) protesting Opie and Anthony shows we really do believe in censorship. This is nonsense. Congress long ago established the FCC, and no one has ever ruled it to be a censorial body. Indeed, when we succeeded in getting the show kicked off the air, we immediately requested the FCC not to go through with yanking the license of the station.

Perhaps the most telling comment by Cavanaugh is his remark that "the most endearing thing about Bill Donohue is that he genuinely seems to enjoy hurting people." It would be more accurate to say I enjoy giving it to intellectual jackasses. Cavanaugh will escape my wrath because he is no intellectual.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and  
Civil Rights

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*America*

March 3, 2003

## **Accurate**

The Rev. Andrew M. Greeley's conclusion that *The New York Times's* coverage of the sexual abuse scandal in the church constitutes "virulent anti-Catholicism" is irresponsible ("The *Times* and Sexual Abuse by Priests" 2/10). The *Times*, like most major newspapers that covered the scandal, never implied that most priests were predators. And this is especially true of Laurie Goodstein, whom Father Greeley attacks. Never have I found her to be anything but professional and accurate in her reporting.

It does no good to blame the messenger for bringing bad news.

William A. Donohue

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