

JESUS' TOMB NOT FOUND; CAMERON'S "TITANIC FRAUD"

On March 4, "Titanic" director James Cameron and TV-director Simcha Jacobovici released what they called a documentary on the Discovery Channel claiming they have evidence of a Jerusalem tomb that allegedly houses the remains of Jesus and his family. In the week prior to the showing, Bill Donohue hit the air waves challenging what he dubbed a "Titanic Fraud."

Not a Lenten season goes by without some author or TV program seeking to cast doubt on the divinity of Jesus and/or the Resurrection. Last April, NBC's "Dateline" featured the wholly discredited and downright laughable claims of Michael Baigent, and two years ago ABC treated us to a special that questioned every aspect of the Resurrection. This year we have the Cameron-Jacobovici thesis.

Israeli archeologist Amos Kloner was in charge of the 1980 investigation of the tomb that Cameron-Jacobovici have seized on 27 years later to make their allegations. "The claim that the burial site has been found is not based on any proof, and is only an attempt to sell," Kloner said. He added, "I refute all claims and efforts to waken a renewed interest in the findings. With all due respect, they are not archeologists." Indeed, Kloner branded their claims "impossible" and "nonsense." Moreover, he said there is "no likelihood" that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. "It makes a great story for a TV film," he concluded.

Joe Zias, who spent a quarter-century at Rockefeller University as an archeologist, said that "Simcha has no credibility whatsoever." Zias wasn't shooting from the hip: Jacobovici's credibility explodes when one considers that he still believes the 2002 tale about an ossuary with the inscription, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." On June

18, 2003, an Israel Antiquities Authority committee unanimously condemned this claim as a modern forgery. Agreeing with this decision were Harvard's Frank Cross and Tel Aviv University professor Edward Greenstein.

Cameron and Jacobovici not only were criticized by people like Donohue, but by Christian theologians and Jewish archeologists. Indeed, they received almost no support from anyone.

Fortunately, the media gave the league the opportunity to frame the issue as a seasonal attack on Christianity that occurs during Lent.

KISSLING RESIGNS

On February 28, Frances Kissling stepped down as president of Catholics for a Free Choice. For a quarter century, she misrepresented herself to the public, pretending to be the head of a bona-fide Catholic organization. It would be more accurate to say that she ran an anti-Catholic front group.

Twice condemned as a fraud by the U.S. Catholic bishops' conference, Kissling would have had to have found another job long ago had it not been for her friends in the establishment. Kissling counts among her donors such organizations as the Warren Buffet Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation. Additionally, Hugh Hefner's Playboy Foundation and the Packard Foundation provide financial support. Without them, she would have folded long ago as her organization has no members.

Bill Donohue offered her this parting shot: "I hope she takes her tapestries of Tibetan Buddhist deities with her when she exits her office, as well as any New Age paraphernalia she may

have acquired over the years. It would also be a good idea to take her poster of Che Guevara with her. How fitting that a woman who spent most of her adult life promoting the killing of innocents in the womb would idolize a terrorist who killed innocent Latinos who made it to birth. In any event, I can't wait to meet her successor, Jon O'Brien, on TV. I promise him a memorable encounter."

Kissling recently said the Catholic Church "abuses...anyone who thinks." It's reassuring to know she can't claim victim status.

KISSLING EXITS IN ANGER

William A. Donohue

Frances Kissling recently stepped down as president of Catholics for a Free Choice. It was not a quiet exit. In fact, she stormed out the door in total anger. The source of her anger made me smile. You're going to smile, too, when you read this article.

"The Catholic right is uglier and meaner than anyone on the religious right," she told Joe Feurherd of the *National Catholic Reporter*. "The viciousness of the [William] Donohues, the Deal Hudsons, the George Weigels and the [Fr.] Richard John Neuhauses is soul-numbing," she said.

This was to be expected. After all, we were among her main adversaries. What was not expected, however, was her tirade against her ideological friends.

As Feurherd accurately commented, "the 63-year-old Kissling saved some of her hardest-hitting barbs for those on the

religious left, particularly, but not exclusively, Catholic progressives.” Like many of her ilk, she was initially excited by the founding of Voice of the Faithful, the reform group that was established in the wake of the scandal. But now she writes them off as being ineffective. She notes, quite correctly, that donations to the group have dropped year after year, leaving Voice with a “paltry number.”

Kissling spared none of her friends on the Catholic left. She blasted Call to Action, the Association for the Rights of Catholics, Dignity and the Women’s Ordination Conference. Indeed, she has no respect for them, saying they are so weak that “the movement doesn’t exist.” All of these groups have long been at war with the Catholic Church’s teachings on sexuality, celibacy, ordination and the like, and all have failed to attract young people to their dissident agenda. They’re dying out, and Kissling knows it.

A new left-wing Catholic group, Catholic Alliance for the Common Good, also merited Kissling’s backhand. She said the group has gotten “a free ride” from the media, making absurd claims about its role in the 2006 elections. She failed to mention that the group was quick to give John Edwards a pass after the Catholic League exposed two anti-Catholic bigots on his payroll, thus further undermining its credibility. No matter, she is right to say that the group is pure “hype.”

Kissling let the Democrats have it in spades. She is furious with the Democratic party for not having the guts to trot out gay rabbis and dissident Catholic feminist theologians. In a burst of candor, she complains that the Democrats call her and say, “Do you have a nun who still wears a habit who can show up at my press conference [or] can you send me a collar?”

That’s right—you just heard it from the horse’s mouth: The Democrats are exploiting the issue of religion for purely political purposes. At least Kissling is more honest in her approach.

And then there are the phony Catholics who love to champion abortion rights but prefer to lie about it in public. "My experience in the progressive movement in the church is that most of the people I work with are personally pro-choice and will simply not admit it publicly. They think it will be bad for their organization and they want to continue to have ties to the hierarchy, to parishes, and they know if they come out on abortion they are going to be totally marginalized within the institution, so it's the one [issue] on which they lie the most."

Kissling even told the *New York Times* that the reason she was stepping down was because she was on the "verge of becoming boring or predictable." The reporter added that Kissling "believed that her efficacy might soon wane," thus the time had come to pack it in. This is quite a confession: She includes herself, along with her ideological soulmates, as failing to get the job done. Too bad she didn't throw the towel in earlier—perhaps fewer babies would have been aborted.

Our side has every reason to smile. Here we have one of the most powerful pro-abortion operatives in the nation admitting that her side has failed—not just on the abortion issue, but in upending the Catholic Church. Of course, our side has every reason not to be complacent as we are still in the midst of a culture war, both inside and outside the Church. But we should never forget that if the Kisslings of this world are mad as hell at our side, then we must be doing something right. After all, it is not our side that has to lie in public about its convictions, and it's not our side that has to adopt "God talk" so as to sound religious. That's their problem.

It is highly unusual for anyone who has headed an advocacy organization for as long as Kissling has to walk out the door swinging wildly at everyone in sight. That she hates the Catholic League, and loathes the ineffectiveness of her side, is something to savor. Thank you, Frances. You've made my day. And you've made all of us Catholic Leaguers smile.

“Good” Catholics Can Make a Difference

“All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.”

This quote, attributed to the 18th-century British philosopher Edmund Burke, is often used as a rallying cry when it comes to attacks against the Catholic Church. Perhaps we can fine-tune the quote this way for our purposes: “All that is necessary for anti-Catholicism to succeed is that good Catholics do nothing.”

This quote appropriately exhorts all of us to fight against the vices of laziness and cowardice and do our part in standing up for the Church. However, there is another implied exhortation embedded in this quote: We can’t take for granted that any of us, let alone the majority of Catholics, are “good.” While we might disagree as to what precisely constitutes a “good” Catholic, we can say that ordinarily a “good” Catholic would not sit by idly while the Church is attacked. And even if he or she did so temporarily, that person should easily be stirred to action when confronted with the reality of anti-Catholicism. But, given the inroads anti-Catholicism has made in our culture with relatively little resistance, it’s fair to ask, are the “good” Catholics doing nothing, or are many Catholics not as “good” as we’re called to be? At the end of the day, what is a “good” Catholic?

A theology professor once asked his class, “What’s the biggest problem in the Church today, ignorance or apathy?” One student flippantly responded, “I don’t know, and I don’t care.”

The student’s answer, upon further examination, is very close

to the mark. Ignorance refers to a defect in the virtue of faith, and apathy refers to a defect in the virtue of charity. With the virtue of hope, these three theological virtues are the necessary building blocks of a thriving Catholic life and culture. I suggest that we need to renew this foundation, in ourselves and collectively as the Church, as the necessary prerequisite for effectively addressing anti-Catholic forces in society.

We are approaching the 40th anniversary of the publication of Pope Paul VI's *Credo of the People of God* (1968), issued at the conclusion of the "year of faith." The Holy Father recognized the crisis of faith in the Church, and he issued his *Credo* to articulate orthodox Catholic teaching to counteract the rise of ignorance and confusion regarding our faith.

Forty years later, while we see some promising signs of renewal, we have also witnessed the devastating effects of the "crisis of faith" that has ravaged two, going on three, generations of Catholics in our midst.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that "'ignorance of God' is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations" (no. 2087), and it further describes several sins against the faith, including heresy, which are routinely ignored today. We are all too familiar with widespread rejection of key Church teachings, from the papacy and Real Presence to the hot button morality issues that challenge men and women to turn away from deviant, immoral behaviors.

We can never lose sight of the fact that our faith is not merely a moral code or abstract body of teachings, but rather a dynamic relationship with the living God. Even so, our faith in the person of Jesus Christ necessarily implies a content of faith. For example, when Our Lord sent out His apostles to make disciples of all nations, He told them to teach all men and women "to observe all that He has commanded" (Mt. 28:20).

Similarly, Our Lord also said, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I tell you?” (Lk. 6:46). Our Lord denies knowing those who claim to be His followers yet do not accept and put into practice His teachings, communicated through His Church (see also Mt. 7:21-24; Lk. 10:16).

Organizations that are serious about their principles will not tolerate views within their own ranks that undermine their efforts. Imagine the NAACP allowing members to push for “separate but equal” facilities, or Planned Parenthood allowing its representatives to publicize the harmful effects of abortion on women and to admit that it’s a form of homicide. It’s not going to happen.

Yet, we have to admit that our Catholic faith has not been adequately taught and embraced in recent decades, such that outright dissent is simply considered an alternative opinion. The deposit of apostolic faith is one of the central bonds of unity that unites Catholics (cf. Catechism, no. 815), but today many people see the Church as a vague cultural reality, not demanding more than loyalty to Notre Dame football and wearing green on St. Patrick’s Day. That’s why abortion-rights advocates such as Frances Kissling or Ted Kennedy can get away with holding themselves out as Catholics in good standing. If we’re not serious about what we believe, how can we expect the “world”—which is the sworn enemy of the Gospel anyway—to treat our beliefs with respect?

In response, we must pray for the grace to live this passage from the Catechism: “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it” (no. 1816).

Meanwhile, the virtue of hope is all about putting our trust in the Lord and His promises, especially when the going gets tough. In the midst of attacks from without and scandals from within, many Catholics might be tempted to despair. They may well conclude that the Church is going to hell in a hand

basket, and they wring their hands of any responsibility for setting things aright. Or, in the midst of their despair, they may conclude that the project of Christianity is no match for the relentless secularism of our culture. The best that we can hope for is to get in a good kick to the shins here or a minor victory there, but the war is lost. Clearly such a mindset betrays a lack of trust in the living God.

As significant of a problem as despair is, the alternate failure of hope—presumption—can be just as deadly. Presumption denies the need to seek God's grace—either because we think we can save ourselves or because God will give us His grace no matter how we conduct our lives. We commonly see this latter mindset in funerals today, which often seem to be “mini-canonizations.”

An objective observer could easily conclude that it really doesn't matter how one lives, because everyone seems to end up in a “better place.” Many poorly formed Catholics embrace just such an implicit universalism. There are probably many reasons why people think that way, including the natural desire that our loved ones make it to heaven. Yet, when we give in to such presumption, then we are not really serious about the claims our faith makes on us. And if we're not willing to go to the mat for our faith, if we're not willing to admit the practical reality and consequences of mortal sin, then we're not going to get worked up about attacks on the Catholic Church. A mushy, uncommitted Catholicism is no match for the anti-Catholic forces that have been unleashed against the Church.

The Catechism identifies two of the principal sins against charity as being indifference and lukewarmness (no. 2094). These sins reveal a lack a passion and zeal in our commitment to God and neighbor. How we respond to attacks against the ones we love can vary greatly, but a failure to respond at all is unacceptable. When we encounter a bully we need to have sufficient self-esteem to defend ourselves the best we can. And what husband would not go ballistic if someone attempted

to harm his wife or children? That's why it's so scandalous when some Church leaders have failed to show sufficient outrage when their spiritual children have been abused.

In today's culture, many people want Christ without His Church. They want "spirituality" without the demands and perceived corruption of "organized religion." (Some might respond that the Catholic Church is not all that organized!) Clearly the work of the new evangelization is to help men and women rediscover the intimate, saving connection between Christ the King and His Kingdom, the Church. We must rekindle love for the Church among her members—manifested not as a spineless tolerance, but as a Christ-centered desire for the good of all.

Christ Himself teaches us about this intimate connection. When Saul of Tarsus encountered Our Lord on the road to Damascus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4). Christ had already ascended to the Father at that time. Saul had never even met Our Lord. Rather, he was persecuting His followers. Yet Our Lord took this very personally. Indeed, Christ from the earliest days identified Himself with His Church, His beloved bride. Attack the Church, and you attack Christ Himself.

Do we experience attacks against the Church as attacks against Our Lord? If more of us did, anti-Catholicism would meet the decisive, unified resistance that has been lacking in our time.

The Catechism says that in every age "saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history" (Catechism, no. 828). Everyday saints like you and me are called to be the difference-makers. For Catholicism to succeed, we need "good" Catholics to live with God's grace the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, thus radiating the light of Christ in an otherwise dark, hostile world.

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“LOST TOMB” IS A LOST CAUSE

When “The Lost Tomb of Jesus” aired on the Discovery Channel on March 4, it wasn’t exactly met with critical acclaim. Indeed, even before the program aired, leading archeologists and historians were quick to dismiss the documentary’s claims as bunk. Below are a selection of criticisms aimed at this latest attempt to debunk the Christian faith. As you can see, the film was met with a good deal of disdain by those in academia.

Joe Zias, *former Curator for Anthropology and Archeology from 1972-1997, Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem:*

- “Simcha [Jacobovici, the director] has no credibility whatsoever...He is pimping off the Bible...He got this guy Cameron, who made ‘Titanic’ or something like that—what does this guy know about archeology? I am an archeologist, but if I were to write a book about brain surgery, what would you say, ‘Who is this guy?’ People want signs and wonders. Projects like these make a mockery of the archeological profession.” (Newsweek, 3-5-07)

David Mevorah, *curator at the Israel Museum:*

- The chances of the filmmaker’s claims being true “are more than remote...They are closer to fantasy.” (McClatchy-Tribune News Service, 2-26-07)

- “Suggesting that this tomb was the tomb of the family of Jesus is a far-fetched suggestion, and we need to be very careful with that.” (*New York Times*, 3-3-07).

Amos Kloner, professor at Bar-Ilan University and archeologist in charge of the 1980 investigation of the tomb:

- “The name ‘Jesus son of Joseph’ has been found on three or four ossuaries. These are common names. There were huge headlines in the 1940’s surrounding another ossuary, cited as the first evidence of Christianity. There was another Jesus Tomb. Months later it was dismissed. Give me scientific evidence, and I’ll grapple with it. But this is manufactured.” (*Jerusalem Post*, 2-27-07)

- “It makes a great story for a TV film. But it’s completely impossible. It’s nonsense. There is no likelihood that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. They were a Galilee family with no ties in Jerusalem.” (ibid)

- “The claim that the burial site has been found is not based on any new idea. It is only an attempt to sell.” (McClatchy-Tribune News Service, 2-26-07)

William Dever, Archeologist, professor emeritus, University of Arizona:

- “It looks more like a publicity stunt than any kind of real discovery...They’re not scholars. They’re not experts. They didn’t discover this material. And I’m afraid they already have gone much too far. I don’t know a single archeologist in this country or Israel who agrees with their findings.” (CNN’s “Anderson Cooper 360°,” 2-28-07)

- “The Da Vinci Code is fiction. And a lot of this story is fiction as well. I mean, to argue, from DNA evidence, that the Jesus in this tomb is not related to Mary, presumably Mary Magdalene, and therefore, that they are not siblings, so they must be married, does strain one’s credulity, doesn’t it?”

(ibid)

- (speaking to the director) "I noticed that many of the experts are quoted out of context. I can assure you that Frank Cross, who was my own teacher and who read the inscriptions for you and confirmed your reading does not agree with you, and I noticed he was carefully edited out just as he finished the reading, very conveniently. Ask him. Ask him." (Discovery Channel's "The Lost Tomb of Jesus: A Critical Look," 3-4-07)

- "I am certainly not trying to defend the Christian tradition. I'm not a believer. As I said to the press, I have no dog in this fight. I'm trying to be a good scholar... One of the problems I have as an archeologist with this whole project is it puts archeology in a rather bad light. It perpetuates the notion among many non-specialists in the public that archeology is a kind of game, a sort of romantic, mysterious treasure hunt in which amateurs can make great discoveries. For me, it represents the worst kind of Biblical archeology, even if it's anti-Biblical, because it seems to me the conclusions are already drawn in the beginning, and that's my real problem. I think the argument goes far beyond any reasonable interpretation." (ibid)

Lawrence Stager, *professor of archeology of Israel, Harvard University:*

- "This is exploiting the whole trend that caught on with *The Da Vinci Code*... One of the problems is there are so many biblically illiterate people around the world that they don't know what is real judicious assessment and what is what some of us in the field call 'fantastic archeology.'" (New York Times, 2-27-07)

Stephen Pfann, *textual scholar and paleographer, University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem:*

- "The so-called 'Mariamene' ossuary contained the names and remains of two distinct individuals. The first name on the

ossuary, 'MARIAME.' was written in the common Greek documentary script of the period on the occasion of the interment of the bones of this woman. The second and third words 'KAI MARA' were added sometime later by a second scribe, when the bones of the second woman Mara were added to the ossuary....In view of the above, there is no longer any reason to be tempted to link this ossuary (nor the ambiguous traces of DNA inside) to Mary Magdalene or any other person in Biblical, non-Biblical or church tradition." (www.uhl.ac, "Mary Magdalene is Now Missing," 3-13-07)

Jonathan Reed, *professor of religion at the University of La Verne, co-author of* Excavating Jesus Beneath the Stones: Behind the Text:

- "It's what I would call 'archeo-porn,' it's very exciting, it's titillating, you want to watch it...but deep down you know it's wrong." (Discovery Channel's "The Lost Tomb of Jesus: A Critical Look," 3-4-07)

- "The thing that I really oppose is the approach to it. That is to say someone is trying to make a chain, and takes a series of links. We've nailed this one now lets move to the next one. We move on to the next one, and at the end, they created a chain. There are so many 'ifs' in that chain, what you need is scientists, archeologists, biblical scholars, to step back, and in dialogue and peer review, evaluate how much weight can that chain bear. And I think at the end of the day when we do that, I think overwhelmingly archeologists, scientists will weigh in and say this can't be supported." (ibid)

Jodi Magness, *Professor of Judaism, University of North Carolina:*

- "There are people who somehow would like to have physical validation for biblical figures and events, and this feeds into that. But most of the general public doesn't have

the expertise to validate these claims. This pretty outrageous claim is being thrown out in the public arena, and it's set up like a situation where it seems like there's legitimate debate about whether it's true or not, and it's virtually impossible to explain in a one-minute sound bite why this can't be true." (Cox News Service, 3-1-07)

Garrett G. Fagan, *classics professor at Pennsylvania State University and author of Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public:*

- "Modern architects of fantastic finds try to provide an air of legitimacy by invoking scientific jargon. They're not scientists but they need to dress themselves in the clothes of science to past muster. Television is not in the business of education, even with the so-called educational channels like Discovery. Ultimately, they're in the business of making money... By the time the rebuttals come out, the mass media would have moved onto the next sensation, and people will have this vague notion that they have found the tomb of Jesus." (Cox News Service, 3-1-07)

Alan Segal, *professor of religion, Barnard College:*

- "The New Testament is very clear on this. Jesus was put in a tomb that didn't belong to him and then he rose and there was nothing left. Why would Jesus' family have a tomb outside of Jerusalem if they were from Nazareth? Why would they have a tomb if they were poor?" (Newsweek, 3-5-07)

Sandra Scham, *editor of Near East Archeology:*

- "In the '90s, I believe, they excavated tombs not far from there, in north Talpiot, where they found similar names. And, in those tombs, the bones themselves, they found as many as three or four individuals in one ossuary. So, the idea that, even the inscriptions on the ossuaries really identifies

the one individual therein is sort of strange. It's just there are so many anomalies here. They don't have the direct evidence." (CNN's "Anderson Cooper 360°," 2-28-07)

Ted Koppel, former anchor of ABC's "Nightline" and moderator of the Discovery Channel's panel discussion about the film:

- "This is drama. This is not journalism." (Discovery Channel's "The Lost Tomb of Jesus: A Critical Look," 3-4-07)

Ronald Hendel, professor of Hebrew Bible and Jewish studies at the University of California, Berkeley:

- As reported by the paper *The Forward*: "These are hucksters and snake-oil salesman who play fast and loose with historical details, said Hendel." (3-2-07)

Bruce Feiler, journalist and author of *Where God Was Born*:

- "They [the Holy Family] lived...Three days away in Nazareth. They could not have afforded [the tomb in Jerusalem]. There is no evidence that this man and woman ever knew each other. There's no evidence they were married. There is no evidence they ever sired a child. I mean, these same filmmakers last year produced a documentary saying that the Exodus was real. Now they're saying... that the New Testament is false. One of these documentaries is false. At least Dan Brown called his book fiction. In fact, I'm prepared to say... there is more truth in Dan Brown's fiction than there is in Simcha's [Jacobovici's] fact." (CBS's "The Early Show," 2-27-07)

UNIV. OF MINNESOTA IS A

DISGRACE

On March 1, the University of Minnesota's Department of Theatre, Arts and Dance hosted the Dario Fo play, "The Pope and the Witch." It was performed through March 9. Bill Donohue raised the following scenario with the press:

"Imagine an anti-Semitic play, written by a Hitlerian, being performed at the University of Minnesota. Imagine, too, that Jews complain and the president of the university justifies the play on free speech grounds. Imagine, as well, that the play is defended by non-Jewish professors in charge of the production. Now really let your imagination run: bowing to pressure from Jews, a panel discussion on the play is scheduled, but no one from the Jewish community is invited to participate. Well, exactly this has happened, except that it's not Jews who are being assaulted by the University of Minnesota—it's Catholics."

When Donohue challenged President Robert Bruininks on the propriety of having this bigoted play performed on his campus last fall, Bruininks offered a lame explanation why the show must go on. Just as bad was Robert Rosen, the university's theater director, and Steven Rosenstone, dean of the school's College of Liberal Arts. According to a report in *The Catholic Spirit*, the local archdiocesan newspaper, "Rosen, who is not Catholic, said he is not surprised by the strong reaction; however, he does not see the play as an attack on the Catholic faith." Rosenstone confirmed that no Catholics have been invited to join the forum and that's because "nobody was selected for the panel on the basis of faith or religion."

That's interesting. The play was purposely selected to bash Catholicism and yet Catholics were purposely being denied the right to be on the very panel they pushed for.

Bill Donohue concluded his remarks as follows: "This is what

the University of Minnesota stands for: free speech for Catholic bashers and no speech for Catholics. Accordingly, I will notify all members of the Minnesota legislature about this development: this is state-sponsored hate speech, partially funded by the target of hate, namely Catholics.”

We are pleased that several Minnesota lawmakers stepped forward and pledged to grill President Bruininks about his outrageous collapse of leadership.

SUPREME COURT PASSES ON NATIVITY CASE

On February 20, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review an appeals court decision that allows New York City public schools to display a menorah during Hanukkah, and a star and crescent during Ramadan, while banning a crèche at Christmastime; the Catholic League arranged for a plaintiff in this case, Andrea Skoros, and the Thomas More Law Center handled the litigation.

We are not happy with this decision, but it is important to note that in the circuit court decision affirming the right of New York City public schools not to display a nativity scene, it did not bar the City from doing so: “We do not here decide whether the City could, consistent with the Constitution, include a crèche in its school holiday displays.”

Furthermore, the appeals court for the Second Circuit rejected the absurd claim by the City’s Department of Education that the menorah is not a religious symbol. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing in this ruling that legally stops the City of New York from allowing principals and teachers to treat

Christianity with the same degree of respect it affords Judaism and Islam. And that means that a nativity scene, not a Christmas tree, deserves to be displayed alongside the menorah and star and crescent.

VERMONT RESORT'S IDEA OF HUMOR

On February 28, J.J. Toland, communications manager for Vermont's Sugarbush Resort, sent an e-mail to his mailing list that offended many Catholics. Titled "March Snow is on the Way," Toland's letter ended with remarks about current skiing conditions. But it opened with two paragraphs bemoaning the "psychological" punishments he received as a student at the hands of Augustinians.

We told the media:

"At one level, this kind of screed may be dismissed as juvenile scribble. But what makes it offensive is a) its wholly gratuitous nature and b) the fact that a noted business establishment would post these remarks in an e-mail. In any event, we are contacting the owners of the Sugarbush Resort, the Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce (listed as a 'Friend' of the company), the six members of the executive staff of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, the Diocese of Burlington and many media outlets in Vermont. We believe in free advertisement."

Within 15 minutes of sending this release to the media—and to the owners of Sugarbush—J.J. Toland and one of the owners called to apologize. We are happy with this conclusion.

FALLOUT FROM THE EDWARDS CONFRONTATION

Just before we went to print with our last issue of *Catalyst*, news reports exploded with accounts of the resignation of Amanda Marcotte and Melissa McEwan from the John Edwards presidential campaign. While we were able to feature this story on our front page, there was a lot of fallout from this issue that we were not able to cover. Here's more on this subject.

Double Standard

- When confronted with the news story—broken by the Catholic League—that two women on his payroll had written several graphically obscene and defamatory statements assaulting Our Blessed Mother, Catholic teachings and religious conservatives, John Edwards called their language “intolerant” and immediately forgave them. After writer Ann Coulter used a slur against homosexuals, Edwards branded her one-word “hateful” and exclaimed that “we can’t stand silently by and allow this kind of language to be used.”
- After she quit, Marcotte tried to spin her way out of trouble by saying that the words she used “had been insufficiently reverent of his [Donohue’s] religion.” Note: The New York Times said it would not print her remarks because it violated their policy on obscenity.
- The Philadelphia Daily News downplayed the hate speech by saying the women bloggers had previously written comments “attacking the virgin birth.” Yet it never printed exactly what was said.

- The Boston Globe was worse—it said the bloggers were shown the door because of “allegedly insensitive remarks.”
- Democratic consultant Jane Fleming was asked by Bill O’Reilly if she would have fired the two anti-Catholic bigots. Fleming, an Irish Catholic, said, “No, I would have stood by them.” When O’Reilly asked if she would have fired someone “who said anti-Black things in the past,” she said, “Yes.”

Smear Jobs

- On February 14, Jeffrey Feldman, a Ph.D. author who writes for Arianna Huffington on “The Huffington Post” weblog, accused Donohue of fomenting violence against the two women. “Bill Donohue, it seems, has achieved his objective: to use the threat of violence to silence political debate in this country,” he said. Donohue demanded a retraction and Feldman rewrote this to say, “The authoritarian right in America, it seems....”
- On February 15, Feldman wrote that Bill Donohue used “his media connections to incite his followers to issue death threats against the two women.” Donohue demanded a retraction and “The Huffington Post” issued a correction making it clear that they did not mean to suggest “that there was any direct link between them [the threats] and either the Catholic League or Donohue.”

Hate Mail

Here’s a very small sample of the hate mail directed at Bill Donohue and the Catholic League over the confrontation with Edwards’ bloggers. While we are accustomed to rantings of this sort, the sheer volume of letters, e-mails and phone calls in this case was noteworthy.

- Anonymous Man: “Bill Donohue can go to Hell!”
- Anonymous Man: “Yeah Bill...who in the hell are you to

talk about what people think!"

- Anonymous Man: "[Dr. Donohue] has a hateful outlook towards those who have different opinions. I hope he apologizes and does something positive to diffuse the hate engendered towards these two people."
 - Anonymous Man: "Hey Bill...if anything happens to Amanda, Melissa, or their families...I will engage a lawyer from Hell that knows all about your Catholicism and you will be sorry! Have a nice day."
 - Anonymous Man: "I am a life long Catholic and I am disgusted at this human being who calls himself a Catholic. He is not a Catholic...This Bill Donohue. To call people gooks...to call Obama white...What is wrong with you! You are a sick human being and I hope God and God is waiting and God is going to reject you and send you to the seventh level of hell that you deserve and burn! You're gonna burn, burn, burn in Hell! You rotten evil man...burn! You and your associates are gonna burn, burn, burn! You rotten evil human being! You're gonna burn, burn, burn in Hell"
 - Anonymous Man: "[To Bill] Yeah! You're an ugly anti-American bigot! I hate you!"
 - Anonymous man: "I just wanted to remind you that Bill Donohue is a f-ing moron."
 - Anonymous man: "Bill Donohue is an ignorant pig-f-er and I hope he chokes on a turd and dies!"
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CHRISTIANITY ON THE FIRING LINE DURING LENT

The following is a list of books, articles and television shows that have called into serious question the core beliefs of Christianity during the Lenten season. No other religion is subjected to such scrutiny and none other has its central tenets questioned during its holy days.

2007

- “Titanic” director James Cameron and TV-director Simcha Jacobovici claimed they have evidence of a Jerusalem tomb that allegedly houses the remains of Jesus and his family. The men presented their extraordinary claims in a March 4 documentary for the Discovery Channel.

2006

- On April 2, during Lent, NBC’s “Dateline” discussed The Jesus Papers, the new book by Michael Baigent, coauthor of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. Baigent contends that Jesus wasn’t divine, wasn’t born of a virgin birth, married Mary Magdalene and sired a child.

When Baigent was recently asked where he got the proof that Jesus was alive in A.D. 45, he said he got it from reports about a book he cannot find (we’re not making this up!). When asked how he knows the tomb was empty because Jesus needed some rest and relaxation, he said, “Unfortunately, in this case, there are no facts.” Put differently, the guy is a crook and “Dateline” has been had.

2005

- In 2005, Easter was on March 27. Pope John Paul II was dying at the time and so the ABC special “The Resurrection:

Searching for Answers," was not aired until May 20. Hosted by Elizabeth Vargas, it reported: "Nearly every single detail of the Easter story remains a question of debate. Among them: Was the tomb really empty? And even more basic: Was Jesus ever buried in the first place?"

- On March 28 (Easter Monday), Newsweek printed a lengthy piece by Jon Meacham called "From Jesus to Christ" that was quite good. But even in this article, the reader is asked to ponder, "How much of this is remembered history, and how much heartfelt but unhistorical theology? It is impossible to say."

2004

- The April 12 (Easter Monday) issue of Time magazine featured a major cover story called "Why Did Jesus Die?" It presented both liberal and orthodox Christian beliefs on the meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

- On April 5 (during Holy Week), ABC had a Peter Jennings special report, "Jesus and Paul, the Word and the Witness." Lasting three hours, it included the Doubting Thomases from the so-called Jesus Seminar. Viewers were treated to the work of Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan, skeptics who believe that Jesus' body was eaten by wild dogs. The documentary clearly did not take the New Testament seriously.

2003

- The Discovery Channel showed a documentary called "James: Brother of Jesus" on April 20 (Easter Sunday). It was based on a book which claimed that James was Jesus' brother and that he was the true leader of the early Church.

2002

- On March 19 (Easter was March 31st), NPR's "Talk of the Nation" ran a segment on "Biblical archaeology" wherein the host said, "Two central holidays for Jews and Christians are

right around the corner, Passover and Easter. Both are based on those religions' holiest book, the Bible. For Jews, the story is the exodus from slavery in Egypt; for Christians, the story is the crucifixion of Jesus and his return from the dead on the third day. But what if those stories were not literally true? What if the ancestors of the Jews were never slaves? What if Jesus did not rise from the dead? What would happen to Judaism and Christianity?"

2001

- The Discovery Channel aired a three-hour documentary called "Jesus: The Complete Story" on April 15 (Easter Sunday). According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the film was about scientists, archeologists, theologians and historians whose "mission is to confirm or deny the facts of Jesus' life and death as written in the Gospels, that billions of Christians around today's world accept as gospel truth." The documentary suggested that perhaps Jesus and Judas planned for Judas to hand Jesus over ahead of time.

- On April 13 (Good Friday), ABC's 20/20 featured a segment with the title "Modern Archaeologists, Theologians and Scholars Develop New Theory About Death of Jesus, and Who Was Responsible." Barbara Walters announced, "Tonight, with the help of leading religious experts, we bring you startling revelations about the life and death of Jesus. In the nearly 2,000 years since his crucifixion, countless acts of love and terrible acts of hate have been carried out in his name. But even as the story endures, it continues to change. Tonight, Bob Brown takes you back to Jerusalem in search of the real Easter story." A Catholic priest, Fr. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor discussed how the seven last words of Jesus should not be taken historically and said of the words in Matthew "His blood be upon us and our children": "This was the root of anti-Semitism in Christianity. This was the root of the Holocaust."

2000

- The April 24 (Easter Monday) issue of *U.S. News and World Report* had a cover story called "Why Did He Die?" Jeffery L. Sheler's piece stated: "But while the Gospel story has inspired piety and devotion through the centuries, it also has spawned darker passions. From the rise of the Holy Roman Empire to the fall of the Third Reich and even today, purveyors of anti-Semitism have sought to justify their prejudices by appealing to the Gospels' depiction of Jews as jealous villains who plotted against Christianity's founder."

1999

- *U.S. News & World Report* featured a lengthy article called "Reassessing an Apostle: The Quest for the Historical St. Paul Yields Some Surprising New Theories" in its April 5 (Easter Monday) issue.

The article, written by Jeffery L. Sheler, reports that some scholars suggest that since St. Paul believed the Second Coming to be imminent, "he did not intend his sometimes stern judgments on doctrinal matters and on issues of gender and sexuality to become church dogma applied, as it has been, for nearly 2,000 years." The article also reports that many charge that St. Paul did not actually write many of the letters in the Bible that are attributed to him.

1998

- NPR's program "Talk of the Nation" with Lynn Neary broadcast a segment called "The Historical Jesus" on April 9 (Holy Thursday). Featuring ex-priest and former co-director of the Jesus Seminar John Dominic Crossan as a guest, the show was all about the Jesus Seminar's theories. While Lynn Neary simply interviewed Crossan about his beliefs on the resurrection, the segment did give him quite a platform from which to present his heterodox views.

1997

- On March 28 (Good Friday) PBS's "News Hour" with Jim Lehrer presented a piece called "Considering Jesus" by Richard Ostling of *Time* magazine. The piece was a profile of the Jesus Seminar and asked the question, "Should New Testament accounts of his [Jesus'] life be taken literally or figuratively?"

While Ostling did not take any positions, the entire piece was about the Jesus Seminar's claims that much of what is in the Bible didn't actually happen. Professor Marcus Borg (Oregon State University) was one of these men who says the resurrection was only symbolic. He was given a good deal more time than N.T. Wright, a scholar (Dean of Lichfield Cathedral) who supported orthodox Christianity and said that the resurrection literally happened.

1996

- The April 8 (Easter Monday) issue of *Time* magazine featured a big story called "The Gospel Truth?" The subtitle accurately conveyed the gist of the story: "The Iconoclastic and Provocative Jesus Seminar Argues that Not Much of the New Testament Can Be Trusted. If So, What are Christians to Believe?"

1995

- The April 10 issue of *Time* magazine included the cover story, "The Message of Miracles." The piece contrasted the faith of American individuals who believe in miracles with the claims advanced by heterodox Christian theologians. The article paid special attention to the group of theologians known as the Jesus Seminar, who had declared in the days before Lent began that Jesus did not literally rise from the dead and who had previously denied the virgin birth.

The article also described other scholars who claim that modern science and archeology show that the miracles of the Bible did not actually happen. Special attention was paid to the renegade professor of biblical studies and ex-priest John

Dominic Crossan, who claims that Jesus' followers were too afraid to bury him, so Jesus' body was left hanging on the cross or eaten by wild dogs. Also mentioned was Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, who rejects much of the Bible and declared, "I'd like to think Christianity is something that would appeal to people who are also well educated and who are modern people."

1994

- On March 31 (Holy Thursday) CNN aired a segment featuring a debate between Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong and Rev. Peter Stavinskas. Spong claimed that the Gospel story of an angel appearing, putting the soldiers to sleep and rolling back the stone of Jesus' tomb is "stuff of legends."

He also stated that, "I just don't believe that modern men and women are going to be called into faith by things like the story of the empty tomb. If you look at the first Gospel to be written, the first time the tomb story appears, no faith is born."

- The April 4 (Easter Monday) edition of the NPR show "Weekend Edition" hosted by Scott Simon included a segment with Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong where he discussed his new book, *Resurrection: Myth Or Reality?* Spong said of the resurrection, "I don't think it's fair to say that what the resurrection originally was was a physical resurrection, or Jesus sort of walking out of the grave and being seen in a physiological way. The question is, what happen to the story between whatever it was that occurred, and the first writing of that?"

- The April 4 (Easter Monday) issue of *Newsweek* featured a story titled "A Lesser Child of God" about the Jesus Seminar and its portrait of Jesus. The seminar claims that the real Jesus was not the Son of God, but an illiterate Jewish peasant. The Jesus Seminar contributors also believe that

Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, rather he was taken down from the cross and buried in a shallow grave where he may have been eaten by dogs.

1993

- *Harper* waited until the month of Easter to release *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, a book by Burton Mack that challenges orthodox Christian beliefs; Mack summoned Christians to “rethink how to live in a multicultural world.” The *Boston Globe* chose Easter Sunday to review it and the *Chicago Tribune* published its piece on the book on Easter Monday.

1992

- Ex-priest and Jesus Seminar guru John Dominic Crossan published his famous book, *The Historical Jesus*, in 1991, but the major newspapers waited until the Lenten season to promote his heterodox views about Jesus being nothing more than a nice peasant who entertained egalitarian ideas. For example, though the *New York Times* had already given Crossan’s book a front-page story, just one week before Easter it ran another story on it. The *San Francisco Chronicle* treated Christians to a review of the book on Good Friday, the *Los Angeles Times* delivered one on Holy Saturday and the *Washington Post* gave its Easter-present review on Easter Sunday.

1991

- On March 28 (Holy Thursday), CNN’s “Larry King Live” featured a debate between two Episcopal leaders, Bishop William Frey and Bishop John Shelby Spong. Spong had recently released a book called *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*. Larry King introduced the show by asking, “Was Saint Paul a repressed homosexual; Mother Mary not a virgin? These are the claims of [Bishop Spong].”

Throughout the show, Bishop Spong advanced his heterodox

views. When a caller challenged him, the bishop stated that his ideas were new, and "I would like to say that every new idea that's come about in the Christian faith has always been resisted...we don't believe that the earth is the center of the universe, but we surely did persecute Galileo when he first suggested that."

1990

- The "Horizons" section of the April 16 (Easter Monday) edition of *U.S. News & World Report* featured three articles by Jeffery L. Sheler titled "The Last Days of Jesus," "The Burial," and "The Resurrection." The pieces focus on the "controversy" over the crucifixion of Jesus, noting scholars who claim the historical accounts of Christ's death and resurrection do not hold up and others who maintain the Easter narrative is a mix of legend and fact.

Sheler describes critics who maintain that the accounts of the burial of Jesus conflict with the likely behavior of Jews of that time, as well as theologians who hold that Jesus' resurrection was purely metaphorical.