

“FORMER ALTAR BOY” RETURNS

They never learn. Either that, or they don't want to learn. A teenager and his girl friend are charged with murder and he is identified as “a former altar boy.” That was the spin that the Associated Press, the *Bergen Record* and the *New York Post* put on the story about Christopher Vasquez. Vasquez is being tried for killing his drinking friend, Michael McMorrow, on May 23, 1997 in Central Park.

The league has tried repeatedly to get newspapers, and especially the prestigious wire service, Associated Press, to stop with such gratuitous remarks. In our most recent letter to AP, we asked what could be done, in concrete terms, to end this abuse. Declaring our opposition to sensitivity training workshops (they smack of “mind control,” we said), we offered the following suggestion: “If reporters simply asked themselves whether they would note that the accused was ‘formerly barmitzvahed,’ perhaps this would settle the issue.”

The league notes that although the *New York Times* made mention of the “former altar boy” status of Vasquez last year, it did not do so in its reporting this time.

We're still waiting to see a story that reads, “Former Altar Boy” cop saves lives, or words to that effect.

SELF-DECEIVING ARTISTS

What is it about artists? Do they really believe their own lies? Consider two recent cases, one from North Carolina, the other from Michigan.

In the October *Catalyst*, we cited an art exhibition at the Ackland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina that merited a Catholic League response. Artist Duane Michals' contribution to art was a depiction of a Christ-like character standing over a woman who had undergone a self-induced abortion. It was advertised as a statement on religious hypocrisy.

In another rendering, one we didn't mention in our article, Michals offered a Christ-figure sitting at a table with a woman; the caption read, "Christ eats dog food with an old Ukranian woman in Brooklyn."

We provided a name and address for members to lodge their complaint. The good news is that the art has been withdrawn. The bad news is that they still don't get it.

The abortion exhibit was explained by the museum's director, Gerald A. Bolas, as a modern-day conflict similar to those in Christ's day when Jesus was criticized for being with tax collectors and talking to a known adulteress. Now why didn't we think of that?

The eating of dog food was understood by Bolas as a statement on Christ's humility as well as his practice of going to people in pain. Guess we're not creative enough to catch that one either.

Perhaps the most foolhardy comment made by Bolas was this: "We know it's impossible to be a museum without having people offended." He may believe that, but what we believe is that it is impossible for Bolas to utter a comment about art without having people's intelligence offended.

Meanwhile, the art director at the South Haven Center for the Arts in South Haven, Michigan, Mike Fiedorowicz, was busy defending a collage that showed Jesus holding a condom. To his critics, Fiedorowicz said, it was impossible for art directors to be judgmental. "What's the line," he asked, arguing that

those who criticize such works are engaging in a line of reasoning “that’s totally subjective.”

Donohue’s response to Fiedorowicz, which was printed in the *Herald-Palladium*, said it was “a ruse to say that judgment calls are subjective. Surely they are. But that is not to say that they are inherently random, without rules that are discernible.”

“To put it differently,” Donohue continued, “figure skating judges, diving judges and boxing referees make decisions all the time. School teachers grade essays with regularity. Art directors aren’t disabled from making distinctions either.”

And we thought all the spinmeisters lived in Washington, D.C.

“OZZFEST” SHIRT DROPPED

In the October *Catalyst*, we remarked how the vile rock performer, Ozzy Osbourne, was marketing his “Ozzfest ’98” T-shirt. On the front of the shirt there is a demonized image of the Virgin Mary, surrounded by a collection of equally demonic characters, including a priest, a monk and angels.

We wrote to Dell Furano, president and CEO of Sony Signatures, the shirt’s distributor. So did many of you (that is why we provide names and addresses). We are happy to report that we have heard from Michael W. Fox, General Counsel for Sony Signatures: the shirt was discontinued in August. We are also happy to report that our letter was dated August 14.

HE WHO LAUGHS FIRST, LAUGHS LAST

The school staff thought it was cute. The local newspaper thought it was cute. The Catholic League didn't, and that is why we brought the issue to the attention of the authorities.

The Halloween celebrations at Tillamook High School in Tillamook, Oregon, took a different turn this year. On November 4, in the pages of the *Headlight-Herald*, was a picture of five female staff members from the school dressed as nuns and a male staff person dressed as a priest. All were photographed holding long rulers aimed at the body of a young boy who was squatting in front of them. The "nuns" were wearing huge rosary beads around their neck. The newspaper thought this scam hilarious, dubbing it "'Divine' intervention?"

Our response was to notify the Department of Education in the state capitol of Salem, alerting them to a problem at Tillamook High School. When asked what the problem was, we simply said it involved staff members who brought religious artifacts (the rosary beads) to a public school. What we want to know is what the policy is regarding such an infraction of church-state lines, and what penalties are ascribed. We then want the policy to be applied to the offenders.

In the event we are told that this was just in fun, then we'll contact the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice asking for an investigation: we want to know what the penalties are for public institutions which take public monies to mock a world religion.

We know there are plenty of school officials who wouldn't blink an eye confiscating rosary beads from Catholic students

in public schools, but who would gladly turn a blind eye to antics such as these. But they can't have it both ways any longer.

VOUCHER VICTORY

November 9 was a bad day for the enemies of choice in education: that was the day the U.S. Supreme Court let stand a lower court ruling that found no legal problem with the Wisconsin voucher program. Because the high court did not actually rule on the merits of a Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling that said okay to vouchers, it did not set national legal precedent. Nonetheless, it gave the green light to the pro-voucher side.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court decision that was left standing allows for taxpayer-funded vouchers for religious schools. The Wisconsin program provides for as many as 15,000 Milwaukee children to attend private or parochial schools, fully 15 percent of the city's total school enrollment. This initiative gives vouchers worth approximately \$5,000 to any child in a family whose income is near the poverty level. It is a major academic success, but one that is resisted by teacher unions.

Speaking about success, the results are in on New York City's voucher program. The privately-funded program, School Choice Scholarship Foundation, provides 1,000 tuition vouchers for private or parochial schools, the distribution of which goes to students who attend the worst-ranked schools in the city. After just two years, reading and math grades for students in grades 2 and 3 posted modest gains, while dramatic increases were registered in grades 4 and 5.

Commenting on the results of New York's program, Harvard

professor Paul Peterson said, “nuns can really deliver education.” As expected, most of the students in the program elected to go to Catholic schools, as opposed to the more expensive private schools (the vouchers were worth \$1,400). Too bad the public school industry doesn’t catch on to what’s happening.

And speaking of that, why is it that the public school bureaucrats can’t refrain from making derisive comments about this subject? For example, last summer, we wrote to John T. Benson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Wisconsin, asking him to explain his comment, “Will Timothy McVeigh start the next church in Milwaukee and see this as a profit-making venture and solicit enrollment and succeed?”

We are pleased to note that State Superintendent Benson has admitted to us in writing that he regrets making this remark. “Your criticism was certainly appropriate,” he said. And his letter is certainly an appropriate response to our complaint.

PROTESTANT GROUP ATTACKS MORE THAN VOUCHERS

In Chicago, the week of November 9-13, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCC), considered a proposal that would put it on record as opposed to voucher programs or tuition-tax credits for private schools. The proposal explicitly said that “public moneys should be used only for public schools.” It further stated that “public education should have the full and conscientious support of Christians and Christian churches.” The NCC is scheduled to vote on this proposal next year.

The Catholic League responded to the wording of the proposal with an official statement to the press:

“It is not certain who the National Council of Churches actually speaks for, but it is certain that millions of Catholics would regard the NCC’s latest political statement as not representing their interests. Catholics, as well as Evangelicals, Muslims and Orthodox Jews, have shown that schools operated by members of their own faith far surpass the academic record of local public schools, and this is particularly true of faith-based schools in the inner city. Knowing this to be true, the NCC amazingly claims that by unequivocally supporting public education they are somehow supporting the best interests of the poor.

“Everyone knows how Catholic schoolchildren were subjected to discrimination by the Protestant-run public schools in the nineteenth century, and that the origins of Catholic schools was in direct response to this bigotry. That is why it is disturbing to read, in 1998, language from the NCC that smacks of this sorry legacy. For example, the NCC proposal says that ‘public education has been under attack for two decades by persons representing *religious*, cultural, and economic views which offer little or no support for public schooling’ (our emphasis). Of course, it could have been said that Catholics would like to use their taxes to pay for schools of their choice, namely parochial ones, but that would convey a positive message. Better to drum up notions of Catholic opposition to assimilation, which is exactly what this proposal does. The NCC should reexamine its language.”

The Catholic League would rather the NCC put its cards on the table and have an honest debate about what really concerns the organization than to hide its politics behind code language. We will keep our eye on this one.

ANTI-CATHOLIC BIAS AT THE NEW YORK TIMES

In the November 2 edition of the *New York Times*, there were several articles about the November 3 elections. The articles were grouped according to "The Senate," "The Polls," "The Campaign" and "The Churches." With regard to the last article, coverage was given to John Cardinal O'Connor's homily the day before wherein he questioned why some were blaming him for killing Dr. Barnett Slepian, the abortion doctor; the New York Archbishop wondered whether "this accusation was really aimed at me, or at those public officeholders and those campaigning for public office who are pro-life."

The article said that "Abortion-rights leaders criticized the Cardinal for casting politicians who oppose abortion rights as victims so soon before Election Day." It quoted Alexander Sanger, president of Planned Parenthood, as charging that the Cardinal was actually delivering "an electoral message."

The Catholic League pointed out the bias in a news release:

"On the front page of today's [the November 2] *New York Times*, it discusses how President Clinton and Rep. Charles Schumer made political hay by speaking in Protestant churches yesterday. Yet on page B6 it has a column, 'The Churches,' that makes no mention of these obvious church and state violations. Indeed, the title 'The Churches' is inaccurate: the only church mentioned is a Catholic one, namely St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"The author of this misstated piece, David Halbfinger, says that abortion-rights advocates were upset with Cardinal O'Connor for simply *mentioning* a public policy issue, and he

quotes Alexander Sanger as evidence. Question: Was Mr. Sanger at St. Pat's yesterday? Was he accompanied by his friends in the pro-abortion movement? Or did Mr. Halbfinger call Sanger for a comment? If so, whom did he call about Clinton and Schumer soliciting votes in Protestant churches? Why didn't he write about it? Why did he find it necessary to go back to 1984 to cite Cardinal O'Connor's objections to Geraldine Ferraro's position on abortion? Why the double standard?"

We are not certain whether this kind of bias is even noticed as such by those who spew it. It's either so deeply ingrained that the offenders are unaware of just how biased they are, or they know exactly what they're doing and simply don't care whether they're caught. But as far as the Catholic League is concerned, it's academic: our job is to root out the bias, whatever the motive.

HORMEL SENT PACKING

James C. Hormel, heir to the Hormel meat-packing fortune, will not be the next U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg. The Senate's Republican leadership saw to that in October when they let Hormel's nomination die.

The Catholic League did not object to Hormel's nomination because he is a homosexual, but we did object on grounds that he previously offered tacit approval of an anti-Catholic group, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. It was during the 1996 San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Parade that Hormel laughed approvingly at the "Sisters" float while doing commentary on KOFY-TV.

What convinced the Catholic League that Hormel should not be confirmed was his failure to repudiate his behavior. He was

given the chance to do so by Senator Tim Hutchinson when his nomination was first considered, but Hormel stuck to his guns and refused to denounce the antics of the anti-Catholic group. It is only just that Hormel will not be an ambassador to a nation that is 97 percent Catholic.

IGNOBLE PRIZE

Last year, the Nobel Prize committee gave its literary award to an Italian anti-Catholic bigot, Dario Fo. This year the committee showed its passion for diversity by bestowing the award on a Portuguese anti-Catholic bigot, Jose Saramago. Maybe next year they'll find a Greek or Spaniard who hates Catholicism.

Father Richard John Neuhaus said it nicely when he opined that "They're ideologically and politically driven awards." The target of which, it hardly needs to be said, is our religion.

Saramago's 1991 novel, "The Gospel According to Jesus Christ," was a vile attack on the Holy Family, one that the Vatican branded as "testimony of a substantial anti-religious sentiment." His defenders said the book was a "bitter satire," but the Portuguese government called it "blasphemous."

The only unanswered question is: What does an embittered anti-Catholic, atheist, communist member do with a prize of \$967,500? Just for the fun of it, maybe the Catholic League should ask Saramago for a donation.