

IRS ASKED TO PROBE SAN FRANCISCO "SISTERS"

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has petitioned the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

The "Sisters" are a San Francisco-based gay group that dress as nuns, mock Catholicism and make small donations to AIDS-related charities. The league's position is that the "Sisters" have long been in violation of the law that allows non-profits a tax-exempt status.

The Catholic League has legally acquired documents filed by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence with the IRS that nominally commit the "Sisters" to certain legitimate goals. The problem is not what the group proclaims to be doing—fundraising and education—but what it spends most of its time doing, namely Catholic bashing. It is ludicrous on the face of it for the "Sisters" to maintain that one of the major issues they address is "the role of religion in daily life." Among their more disgusting habits is simulating sodomy while dressed as nuns, using a gas pump as a phallic symbol.

Over the past year, the league has compiled evidence of the group's flagrantly anti-Catholic and patently indecent activities. Hence the decision to appeal to the IRS to strip the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence of its tax-exempt status.

William Donohue explained his reasoning to the media this way: "If a group of white anti-black bigots dressed up as Al Jolson and mocked African Americans, no one would excuse them because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to selective charities. If a group of anti-Semites were to dress as Shylock and mock Jews, no one would excuse them because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to

selective charities. Similarly, we do not expect anyone—including the IRS—to excuse the Catholic-bashing the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence engage in because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to AIDS-related charities.”

The evidence we have amassed is thorough and persuasive and that is why the time has come for the government to stop the public funding of bigotry under the guise of charitable giving.

The IRS has a policy of not telling the complainant (us in this instance) the status of its investigation. We can only hope that our complaint is treated seriously and that justice is done.

BALTIMORE’S HATE ART

The gift shop in the Baltimore Museum of Art was selling souvenir postcards featuring a picture of the Andres Serrano “Piss Christ” artwork; it shows a crucifix submerged in a jar of the artist’s urine. A protest by the Catholic League led to considerable media attention, inspiring one local Catholic to buy all 13 remaining postcards. The museum, after being barraged with bad publicity, will not restock the item.

In our investigation of the museum, we found that in the aftermath of 9-11, a decision was made to remove a painting by Christopher Wool entitled “Terrorist”; it was done “out of respect to visitors’ sensibilities.” Doreen Bolger, the museum’s director, explained, “The work hasn’t changed, but our perception of it has.”

Our statement to the media said, “For years we’ve been told by

the postmodernists that art has no meaning save what people attribute to it.” But Wool’s contribution proved this to be a lie: they knew exactly what he meant and they didn’t like it. So they banned it. No room for diversity here. However, we charged, “when it comes to dunking the holiest Christian symbol in urine, they withdraw their censorial knife.”

That’s because they don’t care about offending the sensibilities of Christians. And as far as the Serrano hate art is concerned, this gang likes it as much today as they did before 9-11.

We are delighted with the outcome. Thanks to league member Bob Follett for the tip.

BEWARE THE “FRIENDS OF THE POOR”

William A. Donohue

This is the season of giving and give we should: to the surviving family members of the horror of 9-11; to the needy; to the disabled; to all those unable to provide for themselves. But let’s do it without the smugness that too often accompanies the giving.

I say this because it’s been my experience that the people who scream the loudest about helping the poor typically do the least. Worse than that, they are among the most self-righteous people God ever put on this earth. Take the late Mitch Snyder.

In the 1980s, Snyder made himself an icon among rich people who claimed to care about the poor. He appeared on countless

TV shows—always disheveled and in fatigues—imploring Americans to give to the homeless. A bum himself, he refused to support his own family. This remained true even when he came into big money (he got a handsome check from Hollywood after his life was portrayed on the screen). But Mitch “cared” about the poor. He “cared” so much that he even lied to a congressional committee about the real number of homeless persons in the U.S., hyping the number so it would make him look good.

Synder always reminded me of Karl Marx. Marx made a living off his writings that detailed how badly the working class were treated. Yet he never once stepped foot in a factory and never talked to the working class. But he said he knew all about them. The closest he got to knowing the poor was his own maid, “Lenchen,” whom he royally exploited. He never paid the woman a dime, giving her only room and board. But he did get to know her well enough to get her pregnant. Consistent all the way, he never supported his kid and never claimed paternity. We know this because the guy who publicly claimed to be the kid’s father—Marx’s comrade, Friedrich Engels—spilled the beans on his deathbed.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau did the same thing. The intellectual father of the French Revolution wrote endlessly about oppression. Ironically, he made his own contribution to oppression by fathering five illegitimate children, all of whom he abandoned. To top it off, he even had the audacity to write a book about childrearing, *Emile*. But to this day those who call themselves progressive could care less what Rousseau did. What matters is that he “cared.”

It’s so easy to love the poor in the abstract. Who can’t love the masses? Who can’t love the homeless? Who can’t love the working class? The problem begins when individuals appear. Interacting with real live people can lead to all kinds of trouble, especially for those who spend most of their time writing and speaking about the oppressed.

In the 1970s, when I was pursuing my Ph.D. at NYU at night, I was working during the day in a Catholic elementary school in Spanish Harlem, St. Lucy's. The students in my sociology class were uniformly concerned about the poor. The poor were oppressed, victimized, etc. Yet when I asked them to help tutor my students on a weekend, they fell silent. Not because they were busy—few of them worked. But they “cared.”

Similarly, when I was a professor I frequently socialized with the men and women who worked in maintenance, housekeeping and in the cafeteria. What I found striking was that the Marxist professors on campus, who loved to pledge their solidarity with the working class, never even knew their names.

Nothing's changed. For example, if I asked college professors which state “cares” more about the poor, Massachusetts or Mississippi, the answer would be obvious. Yet government data show that Massachusetts ranks dead last among all the states in average itemized charitable giving, yet it's the fourth wealthiest state in the union. By contrast, Mississippi is the most generous state in the nation yet only one state is poorer.

Or consider this. Those of us who are religious are constantly being lambasted in the media as hypocrites who really don't care about the poor. Non-believers, on the other hand, are portrayed as being quite generous. But the truth is just the opposite. University of North Carolina sociologists, Mark D. Regnerus and David Sikkink, drew on data gathered by the Religious Identity and Influence Survey, and found that the more religious a person is the more likely he is to give to the poor. Non-religious persons are the stingiest in the country.

So do what you can this Christmas season to help the needy. But beware the “friends of the poor.” At the end of the day, they're a lousy role model. That's why Mother Teresa was so great: she comforted the sick and provided for the needy

without ever bragging about her work. She not only “cared” about the poor, she actually fed them, bathed them and tended to their every need. And she did it remarkably without a trace of smugness.

THE POPES AGAINST THE JEWS

by Ronald J. Rychlak

A couple of years ago, when critics charged that Pope Pius XII had shown a callous indifference to the plight of the Jews, the common refrain was that if only he had been more outspoken on behalf of the Jews, like his predecessors, thousands of more lives might have been saved. The traditional view of Popes is that they defended the life and safety of Jews, even when some Catholics were not as Christian as they should have been.

Now, along comes a book by David Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews*, in which he argues that far from being defenders of Jewish people, Popes of the 19th and early 20th centuries, up until (and implicitly including) Pius XII were actually anti-Semites who paved the way for the Holocaust. Nowhere in his book is he able to document any modern Pope making any explicit statement in support of anti-Semitism, but he attempts to re-write history by focusing on a handful of issues taken out of context and without a full exploration of the evidence. The result, as Rabbi David Dalin recently wrote in *The Weekly Standard*: “is both false and unpersuasive.”

Kertzer says he was motivated to write his book after reading the 1998 Vatican document, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. That statement explained the difference between anti-Judaism, of which the Vatican admitted “Christians have also

been guilty,” and the racial anti-Semitism embraced by the Nazis. This latter evil contradicts core Catholic beliefs, and the Church has always condemned it.

The difference is illustrated in Kertzer’s discussion of Pope Pius IX and Edgardo Mortara (which took place when slavery was still legal in the United States). This Jewish boy was baptized by a Catholic servant, removed from his family, and brought up by the Pope. Church rules prevented the Christian child from returning to his family (though they were allowed to visit and could have converted to have him returned). It seems very harsh today, but it was not racial anti-Semitism. There was no hatred here. Edgardo and Pius developed a father-son relationship, and the boy grew up to become a priest. Kertzer seems not to understand that such a result would have been unthinkable for an anti-Semite.

Discussing Pope Benedict XV, Kertzer overlooks the most significant, direct piece of evidence. In 1916, American Jews petitioned Benedict on behalf of Polish Jews. The response was as follows:

“The Supreme Pontiff... as Head of the Catholic Church, which, faithful to its divine doctrines and its most glorious traditions, considers all men as brothers and teaches them to love one another, he never ceases to indicate among individuals, as well as among peoples, the observance of the principles of the natural law, and to condemn everything that violates them. This law must be observed and respected in the case of the children of Israel, as well as of all others, because it would not be conformable to justice or to religion itself to derogate from it solely on account of divergence of religious confessions.”

Kertzer fails to mention this express papal condemnation of anti-Semitism, which was published in the Jesuit Journal *Civiltà Cattolica* – though he does seem to quote every anti-Jewish comment published by that journal.

Benedict was succeeded by Pope Pius XI who was decidedly supportive of Jews. In 1928, the Vatican under his leadership issued a statement that was cited by rescuers during the Holocaust. It said that the Church "just as it reproves all rancours in conflicts between peoples, to the maximum extent condemns hatred of the people once chosen by God, the hatred that commonly goes by the name of anti-Semitism." In November 1931, the chief rabbi of Milan thanked the Pope for his appeals against anti-Semitism and his continuing support for Italy's Jews.

In 1937, Pius issued the papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*. This encyclical still stands as one of the strongest condemnations of any national regime that the Holy See has ever published. Kertzer reports that *Mit brennender Sorge* contains no explicit reference to anti-Semitism. His citation for this: the much discredited Hitler's Pope by John Cornwell. It causes one to seriously question Kertzer's qualifications as an historian.

Mit brennender Sorge strongly condemned the neo-paganism of Nazi theories. It stated in part that:

"Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community... whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God."

Pius went on with further condemnations of racial theories:

"None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations..."

No one who read this document at the time had any illusion

about the gravity of these statements or their significance.

On September 6, 1938, in a statement which – though barred from the Fascist press – made its way around the world, Pius XI said:

“Mark well that in the Catholic Mass, Abraham is our Patriarch and forefather. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the lofty thought which that fact expresses. It is a movement with which we Christians can have nothing to do. No, no, I say to you it is impossible for a Christian to take part in anti-Semitism. It is inadmissible. Through Christ and in Christ we are the spiritual progeny of Abraham. Spiritually, we are all Semites.”

This statement was made while the most powerful nation in Europe had an officially anti-Semitic government and was poised only a few hundred miles to the north of Rome. Everyone understood their significance, especially the victims. In January 1939, *The National Jewish Monthly* reported that “the only bright spot in Italy has been the Vatican, where fine humanitarian statements by the Pope have been issuing regularly.”

So how does Kertzer try to convert Pope Pius XI, a celebrated champion of the Jews, into an anti-Semite? In imitation of John Cornwell (a quote from whom appears on Kertzer’s cover) he has found a previously published letter, noted some uncomfortable language within it, and attempted to use it to smear the reputation of a good and holy man.

Monsignor Achille Ratti, the future Pius XI, served as papal nuncio to Poland after World War I. In one of his reports back to Rome he stated: “One of the most evil and strongest influences that is felt here, perhaps the strongest and the most evil, is that of the Jews.” To Kertzer, this brands him evermore as an anti-Semite.

In point of fact, Ratti had been sent to a largely Catholic

nation with instructions to report back to Rome on any significant developments. It so happens at that time there was a significant threat of a Communist revolution. Many of the leaders of this movement were Jewish. Ratti was reporting on what he saw, but he was no anti-Semite.

Even in the early years, Ratti was known to be on good terms with the Jews. As a young priest in Milan he learned Hebrew from a local rabbi. He enjoyed warm relations with Italian Jewish leaders in the early years of his priesthood. During his tenure in Poland, amid Europe's largest Jewish population, he saw anti-Semitic persecution. This led the future pope to denounce anti-Semitism and make it clear "that any anti-Semitic outbursts would be severely condemned by the Holy See."

Instructed by Pope Benedict to direct the distribution of Catholic relief in postwar Poland, Ratti provided funds to impoverished Jews who had lost their homes and businesses. Whereas Kertzer asserts that Ratti only met once with Poland's Jews, and studiously tried to avoid them, better scholars have documented that he greeted and assisted Jews all throughout his three-year stay in Poland.

Kertzer's other attempts to smear the papacy are similarly lacking in balance. He devotes three chapters to the ancient charge that during the Passover, Jews ritually murdered Christian children, to get their blood. This "blood libel" was not an invention of the Popes, nor for that matter of Catholics, but Kertzer implies that being duped by a fabrication is as bad as inventing it, and he makes very little mention of the numerous papal condemnations of the blood libel charge. Moreover, Kertzer charges Fr. August Rohling with being one of the primary causes of anti-Semitic agitation in the Austrian empire during the 1880s, but he gives no mention of the Vatican's rebuke of Rohling for furthering the blood libel.

Kertzer charges that there was a Vatican "campaign" to popularize the infamous, anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. His evidence for this is that a French priest tried to do that in the 1920s. Of course Kertzer ignores that another French priest, Fr. Pierre Charles, SJ, wrote an article in the 1930s thoroughly debunking the forgery and that Fr. Leslie Walker, S.J. devoted much of his work to exposing the *Protocols* as a historical fraud. In fact, according to the *Boston Pilot*, September 1942, "again and again the charge that there exists an organized Jewish conspiracy against Christian civilization has been proved by Catholic scholars to be an impious forgery."

Discussing the treason trial of Alfred Dreyfus, Kertzer's emphasizes the French Catholics who contributed to the persecution of an innocent man, but he fails to mention the Papacy's opposition to this anti-Semitic campaign. In a book about *Papal* anti-Semitism, this is a rather serious oversight. What we do get about Pope Leo XIII is buried in a footnote: two years before this case developed, Leo came out strongly defending Jews and opposed to anti-Semitism.

The truth is that the papacy stands out as the one of the few protectors of Jews during the period Kertzer examines. Selective evidence and crabbed interpretations cannot change that fact. Those who want to know more about this history are advised to consult a booklet published by the American Bishops entitled: *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, which contains the full text of the Vatican's 1998 Shoah document, statements from various episcopal conferences, and Cardinal Cassidy's clarification and response to those (like Kertzer) who misread and misinterpret this important document.

NEBRASKA LAWMAKER DESERVES CENSURE

On November 9, the Catholic League asked Nebraska lawmakers to censure one of its state senators, Ernie Chambers. Our request for censure made national headlines in an Associated Press article and was broadcast on Nebraska television.

What provoked the league to act was a tirade Chambers launched against the Catholic Church on November 5. At issue was a debate over public monies spent on students who attend Catholic schools; scholarships are currently available to poor students who attend private schools, including two Catholic colleges.

Chambers' complaint was aimed at the "Catholic hierarchy." He accused four fellow lawmakers of an "unholy alliance" with the Catholic Church to protect the scholarship program. He said the Catholic Church was a "political entity" that was guilty of such past "crimes" as allowing segregated schools and the persecution of Galileo.

Thanks to one of Chambers' courageous colleagues, State Senator Mike Foley, we are in possession of a transcript of the discredited lawmaker's remarks. Here is a short sample of Chambers' comments made during the floor debate: "You all know that the Catholic hierarchy and church walk through here like a monster in seven league boots, tromping on the senators, intimidating the senators, calling them to task, letting them know that their soul may be at stake if they don't do exactly what they're told to do, exactly as they're told to do it."

Chambers also charged that "were it not for the Catholic muscle on this floor and in committee, which is exercised for the church rather than the state, a lot of things would not even come before us and they certainly would not receive the

votes they get. I can tell how Catholics are going to vote on issues, and I've done it with lobbyists before."

William Donohue told the media, "We are asking the Nebraska legislature to censure State Senator Ernie Chambers." The Catholic League president branded Chambers "a bigot and thus deserves to be reprimanded." "Preferably," Donohue added, "Chambers should resign."

Chambers shot back saying, "They or anyone else from the Catholic hierarchy or their flunkies can come after me any way they want, but I'm not going anywhere." In making this remark Chambers is taunting not just the Catholic League but his fellow lawmakers in Nebraska.

What we find most mind-boggling about all this is the near impossibility of having a rational debate over the merits of public monies going to Catholic schools. Over and over again we have seen the ugly head of anti-Catholicism raise itself whenever this issue is discussed. That public officials often lead the way is even more disturbing.

If Chambers isn't censured for his bigotry, his colleagues in the legislature will be to blame. We are awaiting their decision.

SOUTH CAROLINA'S "FETISH BALL"

This fall the student newspaper of the University of South Carolina, the *Gamecock*, included a very disturbing story about an event held off-campus in Columbia called "The Fetish Ball." The story described in detail the sexual performances

by the participants including those dressed as Catholic schoolgirls, nuns and priests. In reporting the general motivation of the event's organizers, the reporter wrote, "The performance was directed against conservatism and intolerance, represented by stereotypes of the Catholic Church."

William Donohue wrote to the school's president, Dr. John M. Palms, saying, "I find the prominence and placement of the story (the front page of 'The Mix' section with more column space than the preview of the upcoming USC football game) to be outrageous." Donohue also complained that the accompanying photographs were equally offensive.

Donohue made it clear that while he was not holding Dr. Palms personally responsible for what happened, he did feel that a proper response was due the Catholic League.

Dr. Palms began his letter by saying that he identified with our concerns as he himself is a Catholic. He then proceeded to offer the standard legal defense saying that the article in question was not libelous (we never said it was). He ended by saying that the vice president for student and alumni services would investigate this matter further.

The students responsible for this action should be told by faculty and administrators alike that what they did was offensive and in bad taste. But to do so would take courage and that is not a quality found in high quantity on college campuses these days.

APOLOGY ACCEPTED

James Oberweis, a candidate for the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate seat in Illinois, called William Donohue on

November 6 to apologize for making an offensive remark. Donohue accepted the apology and the two men ended their conversation on a friendly note. Here's what happened.

On two occasions recently, Oberweis, who is Catholic, explained that the reason he is not a pro-life candidate is because that would put him in the same camp with the Taliban. He was quoted in the *Springfield Journal Register* as saying, "I think the Taliban is the best example that we've ever had about what is wrong about my trying to impose my religious views on you." On the "Steve Dahl Show" (WCKG-FM), Oberweis said, "I think that right now we're getting a very, very strong symbol in the Taliban of what can happen if we try to impose our religious beliefs on others."

We contacted Oberweis asking him to respond to our news release of October 29 demanding an apology. He responded by saying he had not received all of our e-mail correspondence, so we sent it again. But there was no response. Then, in a story in the November 1 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, Oberweis said that while he concedes that his comparison was "probably not the best analogy," he has no intention of apologizing for his remarks.

At that point William Donohue hit him with his second news release in three days. Here is what he said:

"James Oberweis compares those who want to stop the killing of innocent babies to those who routinely stone to death women and starve little children. He said this not once, but twice. This was deliberate, calculated and designed to smear his opposition. When given the opportunity to apologize, he digs himself in deeper by refusing to do so.

"We have news for Oberweis: the Catholic League is prepared to go toe to toe with him and will now commence a media campaign providing free advertisement for his despicable comments. We are exploring several opportunities and will shortly decide on

a specific strategy.”

Many newspapers picked the story up and it became a hot topic on talk radio. On November 5 we e-mailed Oberweis and then called his office on November 6 giving him one more chance to apologize. Donohue had just finished writing an ad that he was going to run in the diocesan newspaper of Rockford, Illinois, when he was notified that Oberweis was on the line.

Oberweis expressed his regrets at what he said and emphasized that all his children attended Catholic schools and that he has a brother-in-law who is a priest. More to the point, he apologized for what he said.

To be fair, Donohue issued a news release clearing Oberweis' name. “I am delighted that James Oberweis called me to discuss his regrettable remark,” Donohue said. The Catholic League president then got specific: “Oberweis convinced me that a) he is sorry he made this comment b) it was not his intention to malign pro-life lawmakers and c) he will never make such a remark again.”

Donohue ended his remarks by saying, “That’s enough to satisfy me and, I trust, should be enough to satisfy everyone else. Oberweis was cordial, sincere and honest. Those are qualities that can carry him a long way.”

We are delighted that the press picked up on our statement and that this flap ended on a happy note.

PROTESTANT CHURCHES VIOLATE

THE LAW WITH IMPUNITY

In the last week before election day, November 6, there were several violations of constitutional law and IRS regulations committed by Protestant churches. For example, on October 31, New Jersey candidate for governor, James E. McGreevey, won the endorsement of the Black Ministers Council of New Jersey. The group represents 600 churches. On November 4, New York mayoral candidate Mark Green campaigned in "a string of black churches." Similarly, over the weekend preceding the election, there was a gubernatorial fundraiser at a black church in Trenton, New Jersey, for McGreevey; DNC chairman, Terry McAuliffe, was present.

Not one newspaper complained about what happened in black churches the week before the election in New York and New Jersey. Not one television or radio commentator complained. Not one word was heard from the ACLU, People for the American Way or Americans United for Separation of Church and State. But the latter group did complain about Catholic bishops in New Jersey who urged voters to consider human life issues when they vote.

In a comment made to the press, William Donohue sounded the alarms:

"Everyone knows what would happen if a group of Catholic priests, representing 600 churches, were to endorse a candidate for governor. Everyone knows what would happen if a candidate for mayor were to campaign at a Catholic Mass. Everyone knows what would happen if a fundraiser for a candidate for public office were to take place in a Catholic church. All hell would break loose.

"What's driving this is a curious admixture of racism and anti-Catholicism. Quite simply, there are no standards for blacks and a double standard for Catholics. The best thing

that could happen would be if a black Catholic church were to hold a fundraiser for a political hopeful and then see what happens. That would really throw a monkey wrench into the process.”

This kind of duplicity colors virtually every election, not only in the New York metropolitan area but throughout the country. It is a national disgrace. But the Catholic League will not back down and will continue to bring this issue before the public. At some point, honesty and fairness must prevail.

AMERICANS UNITED SEEKS TO MUZZLE FREE SPEECH

Following election day, Americans United for Separation of Church and State accused the bishops of New Jersey of interfering in the electoral process simply because they voiced an opinion on abortion that the radical group abhors.

The bishops in the Garden State had urged Catholics to “use their voting privilege to reflect a choice of candidates who respect and sustain the dignity of all human life.” This was enough for Americans United to say that the pro-life candidate for governor, Bret Schundler, benefited from an “implicit endorsement.”

Americans United took specific aim at Archbishop John Myers. They said the new archbishop “is well known in the Catholic Church for his hardline approach to politics.” They mention that while serving as bishop in Peoria, Illinois, Myers issued a pastoral letter saying it is “morally illicit” for Catholics to vote for pro-abortion candidates.

The Catholic League wasted no time jumping on this issue with a news release. "The latest outburst by Americans United for Separation of Church and State," we said, "shows how little respect it has for the Constitution of the United States and how downright hypocritical it is." So as not to be misunderstood, we warned, "Catholic bishops do not check their First Amendment right to freedom of speech at the church door." This was followed by the comment, "Indeed, they have every right to address any public issue they want which is precisely why this attempt to intimidate them will fail."

Then, drawing attention to the hypocrisy involved, we offered the following: "Americans United is led by Rev. Barry Lynn, a minister in the United Church of Christ. His religion teaches him the value of abortion. Since 1970, his religion has maintained a strong pro-abortion position. Indeed, he himself has boldly proclaimed in public his support for abortion rights."

We closed our statement by pointing out how unprincipled Barry Lynn is: "Now according to the principle he judges New Jersey bishops by, he and his religion are in violation of the Constitution. But, of course, there is no principle involved, just politics as usual. We are delighted that Americans United is upset with Archbishop Myers. That's a good sign and another reason why the new archbishop has won our support."

PRAYER IN SCHOOL ISSUE HEATS UP AGAIN

Three major developments regarding the perennial issue of prayer in the schools recently occurred.

On October 29, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a challenge to a state law in Virginia requiring a minute of silence in the schools. On the legislative front, Rep. Ernest Istook of Oklahoma announced on the same day that he plans to reintroduce a constitutional amendment that would allow religious expression, including prayer, to take place on public property without interference by the authorities. And on November 15, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution encouraging public schools to set aside prayer time for students.

The fact that the high court deferred to the state legislature in Virginia suggests the judges do not want to upset the apple cart on this tender issue in post 9-11 America.

Rep. Istook's constitutional amendment would bar state sponsorship of religion and would also prohibit the preferential treatment of one religion over the other. This would simply affirm the status quo. But what it would also do is protect the right of citizens, including students, to voluntarily exercise religious speech on public property.

The Catholic League publicly thanked Rep. Istook for courageously broaching the issue. "Those opposed to the Istook amendment," said William Donohue, "should not take this opportunity to further demagogue the issue; rather they should dispassionately seek to persuade us why censoring religious speech is the American way."

Regarding the vote by the House, even though it was non-binding, the fact that it passed 297-125 sent an important message to friends and foes of the amendment alike.

We expect that people of faith will continue to seize this special moment and demand that their religious liberty rights be fully restored.