

GARRY WILLS GETS SNOOKERED

In left-wing Catholic circles there is perhaps no one more admired these days than Garry Wills. Wills, as our members know, has nothing but contempt for most of what the Catholic Church stands for and it is this that makes him so popular among “progressive” Catholics. It should also be noted that these Catholics tout his intellect as if the guy were some sort of genius.

But now Garry doesn't look too bright anymore. We're not speaking of his writings on Catholicism (they are bad enough), we're speaking of how he got snookered by Michael Bellesiles.

In the fall of 2000, Bellesiles, a professor at Emory University, published a book titled, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*. The book sought to demonstrate that it is a myth to believe that early Americans were a gun-toting people. The book quickly became the most cited source of the anti-gun crowd: they argued that the Second Amendment had very limited purposes and should therefore be honored today by making gun control a national priority.

But not everyone was buying this thesis. Some historians, for example, began to raise serious questions about Bellesiles' scholarship. It got to the point that more recently a three-person committee of scholars from Princeton, Harvard and the University of Chicago did a fact check of Bellesiles' work and concluded that it showed “evidence of falsification,” “egregious misrepresentation,” and “exaggeration of data.” They concluded by saying “His scholarly integrity is seriously in question.” In October, Bellesiles announced he will retire from Emory December 31.

So how did Wills got snookered? On September 10, 2000, in the pages of the *New York Times Book Review*, Wills raved about the

book: “Bellesiles has dispersed the darkness that covered the gun’s early history in America. He provides overwhelming evidence that our view of the gun is as deep a superstition as any that affected Native Americans in the 17th century.”

To which we say: Wills’ review of the Belleslies volume provides overwhelming evidence that P.T. Barnum was right—“There’s a sucker born every minute.” It also shows that if Wills is so gullible in this area of history, his credibility in accurately analyzing Catholicism is questionable at best.

NEWSDAY’S SHERYL McCARTHY: CLASSIC BIGOT

Sheryl McCarthy, columnist for the Long Island daily *Newsday*, had an article in the October 24 edition of the newspaper that provided a classic example of anti-Catholic bigotry. It was so bad we decided that a new strategy was needed.

We mailed a copy of McCarthy’s article to every bishop in the nation and to all 235 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. With regard to the latter group, we asked the English department chairs to distribute copies of this column to professors of journalism. “Catholic students need to know how anti-Catholic bigotry has been mainstreamed,” William Donohue said, “and no one offers a better example than Sheryl McCarthy’s piece of October 24.”

McCarthy had some cute ideas about Halloween costumes. Her list of characters included Martha Stewart, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Kenneth Lay, Lizzie Grubman, Michael

Bloomberg and Johnnie Cochran. There was one entry that was not a character: it was a group.

“A Catholic priest’s costume would also be a crowd pleaser this year,” McCarthy said, “replete with clerical collar and a lascivious grin.” Donohue picked up on this by commenting, “Notice she wants a bin Laden and a Hussein costume but not a Muslim one. That’s because McCarthy has learned that it is wrong to generalize from the individual to the collective. Except for priests. They deserve it—all 46,000 of them. Never mind that a whopping two-thirds of one percent of priests have had to step aside awaiting an investigation of charges against them, McCarthy says it’s time to stick it to them all.”

Donohue noted that McCarthy “is sensitive to others.” He quoted her saying, “Some characters would be in bad taste for Halloween costumes. There should be no suicide bombers with dynamite strapped to their waists, and no Beltway snipers carrying rifles and cell phones.” But “what is not in bad taste,” Donohue said, “is to mock priests as perverts, even though 99 and a third percent of them are not even being questioned about sexual misconduct.”

What McCarthy did was classic bigotry, plain and simple.

NO EXEMPTIONS FOR PLANNED PARENTHOOD

In many parts of the country, legislators are mandating that members of the clergy report sex abuse crimes that come to their attention. This is all fine and good except that these laws typically do not require that every adult who interacts with youngsters must do likewise. Particularly egregious is

the exemption given to abortion providers such as Planned Parenthood.

The Catholic League has begun a campaign asking state legislators to end the exemptions. For example, last spring it was revealed that Planned Parenthood employees agreed to keep secret 91 percent of the reported cases of statutory rape that came to their attention.

Moreover, when the New York state legislature considered a mandated sexual abuse bill last June, it was opposed not by the New York State Catholic Conference but by the New York Civil Liberties Union and Family Planning Advocates. They thought it appropriate that the clergy be forced to report such cases but asked for an exemption for those engaged in medical and counseling services. Thus did they reveal their real agenda: get the clergy but give abortion counselors a pass.

Just as disturbing is the story in the October 31 edition of *Newsday* that mentioned the irresponsible comments of Nassau County legislature presiding officer Judith Jacobs. She lambasted Denis Dillon for suggesting that the sexual abuse bill being considered be extended to abortion providers as well. She charged that Dillon "crossed the line between his personal beliefs and upholding the law." William Donohue said to the media, "This comes dangerously close to suggesting that Dillon's Catholicism is getting in the way of his professional duties."

If these bills are not made inclusive to cover counselors, social workers, abortion providers et al., then they will be seen for what they are: political gamesmanship aimed at getting the clergy. It will also demonstrate the selective interest that lawmakers have in protecting minors from adult predators.

“THE CRIME OF FATHER AMARO”

When the Catholic League learned that a controversial new movie was to open in the U.S., “The Crime of Father Amaro,” we asked Samuel Goldwyn Films if we could preview it. They graciously agreed. The movie, which opened in select theaters on November 8, was previewed in New York on November 5 by Louis Giovino, the Catholic League’s director of communications. He prepared a report for William Donohue who, in turn, issued the following news release:

“Imagine a film script that is wholly fictitious and portrays in the most vicious way every member of the clergy introduced to the audience. That’s right—there are no exceptions: if the clergy are not dishonest and corrupt, they are vile and abusive. Is there anyone who wouldn’t question the motive of the writer and producer? We do. After all, it’s our religion that’s being assaulted in ‘The Crime of Father Amaro.’

“Here’s whom viewers meet: a) a bishop who abuses his powers to squelch a scandalous news story b) a hypocritical pastor who launders money and has an affair with his housekeeper c) a liberation-theology priest who is at once corrupt, supportive of guerillas and soft on abortion d) and Father Amaro. He hits on a 16-year old catechism teacher, gets her pregnant, refuses to marry her and then gets her to have an abortion. Oh, yes, she hemorrhages and dies. Move over Bing Crosby—make way for Father Amaro.

“Scenes include an old eccentric woman who steals from the collection plate, spits out the Host at Mass and feeds it to her cat. Then there is Father Amaro in the buff dressing his girl in a robe meant for the statue of the Blessed Mother commenting, you’re ‘more beautiful than the Virgin.’ And all

the way through, celibacy is ridiculed.

“But guess who likes this flick? The DNC’s favorite ‘Catholic’ organization, Catholics for a Free Choice (see the Autumn issue of *Conscience*, the group’s journal). And the Democrats wonder why they are so hated these days. When will Terry McAwwful finally get it?”

DAVID E. KELLEY’S OBSESSION WITH CATHOLICISM

The November 10 episode of the ABC show “The Practice” used the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church for script. According to the show’s writer, David E. Kelley, the purpose of this episode was to pose a question to Catholics: “Can Catholics adequately express their rage without quitting the church?”

Catholic League president William Donohue answered Kelley in the following news release:

“There is not much about the Catholic Church that David E. Kelley likes. We know this because Kelley has been very busy over the years writing scripts that are highly critical of virtually every Church teaching on sexual ethics. Like many former Catholics, Kelley just can’t pack it in and find another home. So he hangs around. His credentials include a series of Catholic-baiting shows he wrote for ‘Picket Fences’ and a slew of crabby shows he’s penned for ‘The Practice.’ Indeed, the very first month that ‘The Practice’ aired, Kelley unloaded on Catholicism.

“To give him his due, Kelley has corresponded with me at some

length on this issue and always in a congenial manner. Yet he always returns to dish out more dirt. Now the scandal in the Church has gripped him. Indeed, he has several episodes on this issue scheduled.

“Kelley is not wrong to use the scandal for a script. Nor would he be wrong to use the upswing in syphilis and AIDS among reckless gays as a script. But this is not what interests him. He wants to seize on the less than 1.5 percent of priests who have been guilty of sexual abuse over the last 40 years. The fact that 99.3 percent of priests today are not even being questioned about sexual abuse means nothing to Kelley: there is a scandal in the Catholic Church and it is his job to exploit it. That is why he irresponsibly casts a mother who will not allow her son to be baptized because in a few years the kid might be raped in the confessional.

“Here’s my answer to Kelley’s question: Yes, Catholics can adequately express their rage at the Church’s handling of this problem without quitting. But I have a question for him: can he adequately express his contempt for Catholicism without showing his hand?”

FIDELITY MATTERS (OR SHOULD)

Voice of the Faithful is a lay Catholic organization that was founded this year in response to the scandal in the Church. It is not clear at this early date how the organization will evolve. It wants to help make reforms in the Church. The question is whether the group has an agenda as well. Some bishops say it does and have barred Voice of the Faithful from meeting in church facilities. Other bishops have agreed to meet with representatives of the group.

George Weigel, always a reliable source, has said the following about the lay organization: "If the leadership of Voice of the Faithful would say unambiguously, 'We accept the Catholic Church's teachings on contraception, homosexuality, the indissolubility of marriage, and the good of celibacy,' then VOTF would have a real place at the table in helping lead a genuinely Catholic reform of the Catholic Church." He added, "I don't hear that at all."

Weigel's remarks were not appreciated at *Commonweal* magazine. The liberal publication, which takes great amusement in questioning the Church's teachings on a whole range of subjects, shot back at Weigel: "In other words, 'genuinely Catholic reform' will take place around a very small table." The editorial continued by saying, "Only those who agree with Weigel and John Paul II's 'authoritative interpretation' of Vatican II are invited."

This is so typical it's boring. The quotes say it all: *Commonweal* does not accept anything the pope says as being authoritative. Presumably, he's just another player in the game. But the magazine's editors may be on to something real when they imply that the likes of them will not have a place at the table of Church reform.

HATEMONGERS SEIZE THE SCANDAL

The Catholic League has long been a target for those who hate our defense of the Church. But this year we have received more hate mail than ever before. And the quality is different, too: it's more obscene than ever before.

Why is this happening? The biggest reason is the crisis in the Church. Those who hate the Church are taking advantage of the

crisis by piling on big time. They think, mistakenly, that their time has come and are doing everything they can to exploit the scandal. Our victory over “Opie and Anthony” also triggered an enormous outburst of hate mail.

There is a group in San Bernardino, California, that continues to send us hate mail via postcards. Citizens Against Religious Zealots takes aim at many religions and religious figures, but none more than Catholicism and Catholic leaders. “Beware the Cult of Catholicism” appears on the back of one of its postcards. It also warns against “extremists” like the pope.

The most offensive postcard we’ve seen says on the front, “Don’t Let Them Go To Mass Alone.” On the back there is a drawing of two children with an image of a priest in the middle; on the bottom is the inscription, “Watch Your Kids.”

Worse than this is hateful greeting cards put out by NobleWorks. It has a card, “The Ten Best Priest Jokes,” that is so obscene we will not reprint what it says. But trust us, this is a new low: that a greeting card company would release something this vile is incredible. Oh, yes, we checked to see if other religions were targeted as well. You guessed it—the cards that poke fun at other religions couldn’t compare to the ones aimed at Catholicism.

Write to NobleWorks at P.O. Box 1275, Hoboken, New Jersey 07030.

RICH BIGOTS

Every racial, ethnic and religious group has its share of bigots. Sociological studies on bigotry have been done for decades and most of them report that bigots tend to be

clustered at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. But there's one group that stands out from the crowd: anti-Catholic bigots. They're all over the socio-economic scale and are especially noticeable at the top.

Somerville, Massachusetts, is a wealthy place. It is also home to a surfeit of bigots. Anti-Catholic bigots, that is. How do we know? Because they can't seem to get enough of Catholic-bashing plays.

For the second consecutive year, the Somerville Theatre is hosting "Jesus Has Two Mommies." By scheduling it during the holiday season, December 6 and 7, the promoters are sending a message to Catholics. We only wish we had the time and resources to survey these rich bigots to find out why they can't let go.

One thing's for sure: if we asked them if they thought of themselves as open-minded or bigoted, the answer would surprise no one. Unfortunately, they wouldn't be lying—they actually believe they're among the most open-minded people in the nation. Empty-minded would be a more accurate description, though we're sure these rich bigots would be aghast at such a thought.