

# WHAT AILS AP?

On October 21, the Associated Press (AP) ran a story on Pope John Paul II's installation of new cardinals. AP is the most influential wire service in the nation—small and medium-sized newspapers draw heavily from its reporting. So it was with some interest that we tracked how it covered this story throughout the day (it continually updates its stories online).

Here is what the story was titled at 2:34 am (EST) that day: "Pope John Paul II to Install 30 Cardinals"—the story was repeated at 3:58 am. At 5:12 am, the tense was appropriately changed to read, "Pope John Paul II Installs 30 Cardinals." At 6:25 am, it was changed again to read, "List of 30 Cardinals Installed by Pope," and later it read as it was reported at 5:12. But by 9:53 am, we noticed something altogether different: "Ailing Pope Installs 30 New Cardinals."

Had the pope gotten weary throughout the day? Or was it the weariness of the AP reporter that was at work? Whatever it is that ails this person we'd sure like to know.

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## BRIEF FILED IN PLEDGE CASE

The Catholic League, represented by The Thomas More Law Center from Ann Arbor, Michigan, will file an *amicus curiae* brief in the United States Supreme Court in the Pledge of Allegiance case. The high court is expected to rule on this issue next spring.

The brief will seek to overturn the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision *Newdow v. United States Congress*, which held

that the phrase “under God” rendered recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by California public schoolchildren an unconstitutional establishment of religion.

It will also be maintained that the term “under God” merely pays tribute to the fact that the founding fathers understood this to be a nation of inalienable rights, the source of which is the Almighty. This is not an establishment of religion; rather, it is a reflection of an historical reality. Indeed, from the Thanksgiving proclamation to the establishment of Christmas as a federal holiday, it is a matter of common experience in this country to give national recognition to the religious roots that undergird our society.

The Catholic League has contended for 30 years that our constitutional liberties regarding religious liberty have been jeopardized by ideological zealots out to undo our religious heritage. They see religion as an obstacle to liberty; we see it the way the founders did—as a constitutive element that allows for freedom. It is now up to the Supreme Court to say which perspective is right.

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## DEBUNKING THE DA VINCI CODE

*In mid-October, ABC invited the Catholic League to view a rough cut of an upcoming ABC News special, “Jesus, Mary, and Da Vinci,” which dealt with some of the theories underlying Dan Brown’s novel The Da Vinci Code. Given the offensive nature of some of the novel’s claims, it would be difficult to believe that the invitation was sent without an eye to ABC’s past trespasses against Catholics. League policy analyst Joseph De Feo attended the screening and offered his comments.*

*The Da Vinci Code may be fictional, but Dan Brown has declared*

himself “a believer.” ABC News produced an hour-long special attempting to separate fact from fiction in Brown’s book.

Briefly, Brown’s premise is that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had a child. At some point after the Crucifixion, she fled to France, where her child sired a line of kings. Meanwhile, the Church conspired to sully the Magdalene’s name and remove all evidence of her sexual relationship with Jesus from the Bible. Only a secret society knew the truth, which was hidden through the ages for fear of persecution by the Church.

Even if the theories examined in this special hardly warrant serious treatment, a program discussing them should still hold to certain journalistic standards. The ABC special had its lapses. Its very existence dignified conspiracy theories with attention beyond their merits, treating them as real arguments to be examined instead of canards best dismissed.

Opening questions for viewers sounded like lines from a cheap exposé: “What if we told you that some people think Mary Magdalene was not a repentant prostitute but instead Jesus’ wife?” And a majority of airtime was given to cranks and ideologues who bought the crackpot theories wholesale. Adding to the already-lopsided representation was commentary by only one priest: Notre Dame theologian Father Richard McBrien. He stated that Mary Magdalene had all the credentials to be an apostle (meshing nicely with his desire for the ordination of women). He also remarked that the Church’s attitudes toward sex have been “very unhealthy.”

Another flaw was the program’s inconsistent use of evidence. The special notes that we now know there is no biblical evidence conclusively showing Mary Magdalene to have been a prostitute, and so the matter is settled. It also notes that there is no biblical evidence of Jesus’ marriage to the Magdalene, but the same historical source is ruled out on this question. If the Bible was rewritten to hide this relationship (as Brown holds), why trust it on the matter of the

Magdalene's prostitution—or any other matter?

The program suggested that there is something sinister about “orthodoxy,” and its often-ominous tone was better suited to a program on the Trilateral Commission and the New World Order than to a program on a major world religion. These are just a few faults of the program itself.

After the screening, the two dozen or so viewers were invited to lunch and a friendly discussion of the show. In attendance were the show's producers, a few ABC executives (including David Westin, the head of ABC News), members of the media, representatives from a few Christian churches, and others. I was the sole representative of a Catholic organization.

Elizabeth Vargas, the program's anchor, opened the discussion. She and a few ABC producers were quick to mention their Catholic upbringings. When I pointed out that Father Richard McBrien was a curious choice to represent the Church, Ms. Vargas pointed out that Fr. McBrien made for an interesting guest because he will surprise viewers by deviating from the stereotype of a priest parroting the accepted teachings of the Church. I noted that there are worse stereotypes to fight.

Several guests claimed to have learned a good deal from *The Da Vinci Code*. One ABC correspondent embarrassingly said that she did not know that the divinity of Jesus was only established in the fourth century. Other howlers clearly demonstrated *The Da Vinci Code*'s ill effect on popular historical knowledge—one of the few undeniable facts established during the discussion.

The most interesting question is why such a pretentious and historically inaccurate novel is getting so much attention. Its plot is stretched thin over a frame of hackneyed ideas—a muddle of Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry, reinforced by feminism and New Age mush. The answer may be that the atmosphere is just right for it: with the scandal still hovering over the Church, people are open to conspiracy

theories about it. If the theory denigrates the institutional Church in favor of ill-defined spirituality, belittles celibacy, and raises the possibility of ordained women, it's a guaranteed bestseller.

**From the *New York Times*, November 3, 2003**

**"The Volatile Notion of a Married Jesus"**

"Joseph De Feo, policy analyst for the Catholic League, then asked the show's producers why they hadn't solicited opinions from Roman Catholics other than the Rev. Richard McBrien ... who, Mr. De Feo said, is known chiefly for his far-out views and his 'schtick' about Mary Magdalene's primacy among Jesus's apostles." Rudy Bednar, an executive producer at ABC, responded that the Catholic view had been expressed in the documentary by various evangelicals the producers had consulted. Mr. De Feo, perhaps bristling at the idea that arch-Protestants should represent the opinions of Catholics, shot Mr. Bednar a look of incredulity."

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# COLUMBIA REDUX

Last year there was an ugly incident during the half-time festivities at the Fordham-Columbia football game. One of the students from Columbia's band took the microphone and made some obscene comments about Catholic priests. It led to a meeting between William Donohue and Columbia University president Lee Bollinger. Donohue believed that such incidents would no longer occur. But he was wrong.

On October 25, there was a story by Sean McKeon on the Internet site of *Massachusetts News* called "Columbia College Band 'Celebrates' Partial Birth Abortion." McKeon described what allegedly happened at the October 25 football game between Columbia and Dartmouth. Here is an excerpt from the story:

"Columbia's 'band' was the first on the field at half time, beginning its show with the announcer for the band uttering some disparaging remarks about the right to die case in Florida and Jeb Bush. The announcer then introduced the Columbia half-time show by inviting the crowd to join the band in their 'Celebration of partial-birth abortion;' this was followed by some ranting against the Pope and what the announcer described as his (the Pope's) 'drooling and stuttering' speech."

Donohue wrote to Bollinger on November 10 saying, "If this is true, it is disturbing. And it obviously suggests a pattern that needs to be checked." He awaits a reply.

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# JUSTICE IN NEW YORK

On August 15, 2002, a Virginia woman, Loretta Harper, had sex in St. Patrick's Cathedral with her pal, Brian Florence, in front of men, women and children, while a detailed report of their activity was broadcast on the WNEW radio show "Opie and Anthony." Subsequently, the Catholic League got Opie and Anthony fired, and the station was fined. Florence, 38, dropped dead in late September. As for Harper, on November 6, she was given five days community service by the Manhattan D.A.'s office.

Lucky for Harper she didn't light up a cigarette when exiting St. Pat's—she would have been sent up the river.

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# DON'T FORGET THE WITCHES

It is not every day that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) celebrate religious liberty, and that is why November 14 was so special: that was the day they celebrated their victory for witches' rights.

On November 14, a federal court ruled that a Wiccan member of a county board of supervisors in Chesterfield, Virginia could not be denied the right to pray before board meetings; the judge said that if Christian members of the board could pray, so could the witch, Cyndi Simpson.

The ACLU declared it a victory for "non-majority religions," while AU called it a "tremendous victory for religious diversity."

The truth is quite different. Both organizations have long

sought to undermine Christianity. One tactic is to sue when public school students sing "Silent Night"; another is to dilute the role of Christianity by elevating minority religions to an equal status. Defending Satanists and witches fits in perfectly with this mindset.

In short, the only kind of religious liberty these groups like is one that works against the dominant role Christianity has had in American history.

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## **THE ADL'S DEFINITION OF AN ANTI-SEMIT**

If someone makes an anti-Semitic statement, does that mean he's an anti-Semite? It depends. Consider the way the ADL judges anti-Semitism these days.

ADL chief Abraham Foxman initially said that while he had a problem with "The Passion of Christ," he did not think Mel Gibson was an anti-Semite. He quickly changed his mind and branded Gibson anti-Semitic. Within a day, Foxman changed his mind again saying, "I'm not ready to say he's an anti-Semite." He has since changed his mind again, charging that Gibson is "infected" with anti-Semitism.

"The Gospel of John" is a movie that has just been released. The script follows the scriptural text to the letter, including those passages that upset many Jews. Yet the ADL said the film was a "responsible" treatment of the text, raising questions whether it is Gibson's "traditional" Catholicism that accounts for the ADL's vendetta against him.

Silvio Berlusconi is Italy's Prime Minister and one of the



richest persons in Europe. He got so upset last summer with a German legislator that he said the lawmaker would make a "perfect" Nazi guard in a movie. This upset Jews throughout Europe. Then in the fall Berlusconi quipped that Mussolini was a "benign" dictator who "did not murder anyone." In fact, he said, "Mussolini sent people on holiday to internal exile." Again, European Jews were up in arms. Immediately following this remark, the ADL presented Berlusconi with its Distinguished Statesman Award. This, in turn, led American Jewish leaders to blast the ADL.

Gregg Easterbrook is a writer for the *New Republic*. He recently criticized Disney chief Michael Eisner and Miramax chief Harvey Weinstein for irresponsibly releasing the movie "Kill Bill." He charged that they were "Jewish executives" who "worship money above all else." The ADL went bonkers branding Easterbrook an anti-Semite. The author was immediately defended by his Jewish friends at the magazine. When Easterbrook apologized, the ADL called it "insufficient."

When Foxman was recently asked about a comment made some time ago by singer Dolly Parton—"The Jews control Hollywood" is what she said—the ADL executive brushed it off as "anti-Semitic stereotyping." When pressed whether she was an anti-Semite, Foxman said "no."

Foxman has a new book out called, *Never Again: The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism*. In it the reader finds him listing real anti-Semites, along with those who clearly are not. Perhaps the most irresponsible listing is that of William F. Buckley, Jr. Not only is Buckley not an anti-Semite, anyone familiar with the author knows he has been an outspoken opponent of anti-Semitism.

All of which leaves us where we began. Who qualifies as an anti-Semite these days at the ADL?

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# DOES THE PUBLIC OBJECT TO SEXUAL ABUSE?

It is becoming ever so clear that what matters most regarding sexual abuse in the U.S. today is the profile of the abuser, not the abuse itself.

For instance, if the abuser is a priest, John Q. Public calls for his head. If he's a celebrity, he wants his autograph.

Larry Flynt is one of the nation's richest pornographers. He is also a man who has been charged by his daughter with sexually molesting her before the age of 10, and of beating and molesting her and her sisters. But none of this stopped him from getting 15,000 Californians to vote for him for governor in October.

Kobe Bryant, the Los Angeles Laker star, is on trial for rape. In his first appearance on the basketball court during the preseason, Bryant was greeted with "thunderous applause" according to the ABC show "Good Morning America." When ESPN reporter David Aldridge was asked whether any of the fans were wearing his number-eight jersey, here is what he said: "Oh, sure. Yeah, there were a lot of number eights in attendance. You know, a lot of kids wearing number eights."

R. Kelly is one of the biggest stars of rap music in America. In June, 2002, he was indicted in Chicago on 21 counts involving child pornography. In January of this year, he was arrested in Miami on child porn charges; included in the charges is the accusation that he was photographed having sex with a minor. According to the *New York Times*, when he appeared before a sellout crowd in New Jersey on January 16, "the crowd gave him a sustained standing ovation." His new

album, “Chocolate Factory,” has sold 2.5 million copies.

All of which proves our point: there is one standard for priests, and one standard for celebrities. Sexual exploitation—even of kids—seems not to matter, just so long as the person doing it provides a service the public wants.

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# THE VOTE ON PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION

The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act passed 64-34 in the Senate on October 21, 2003. Voting “yes” in favor of the bill were 17 Democrats and 47 Republicans. Voting “no” against the bill were 30 Democrats, 3 Republicans and 1 Independent. Not voting were 1 Democrat and 1 Republican.

**Catholic Senators who voted “no”:**

<u>Senators and Party</u>	<u>State</u>
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Christopher Dodd (D)	CT IA IL MA MA MD ME RI WA WA
Tom Harkin (D)	
Richard Durbin (D)	
Edward Kennedy (D)	
John Kerry (D)	
Barbara Mikulski (D)	
Susan Collins (R)	
Jack Reed (D)	
Patty Murray (D)	
Maria Cantwell (D)	

### Vote according to Religious Affiliation:

<u>"No" vote</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>"Yes" vote</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>Not Voting</u>	<u>2</u>
Catholic	10	Catholic	12	Episcopalian	1
Christian	1	Baptist	6	Methodist	1
Congregationalist	2	Christian	4		
Episcopalian	2	Church of Jesus Christ	1		
Greek Orthodox	2	Episcopalian	8		
Jewish	9	Jewish	2		
Methodist	4	Lutheran	4		
Presbyterian	2	Methodist	10		
Protestant	1	Mormon	4		
United Church of Christ	1	Presbyterian	10		
		Protestant	2		
		Unitarian	1		

		No Religious Affiliation	1		
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### **Vote according to sex:**

<b><u>"No"</u> Vote</b>	<b><u>"Yes"</u> Vote</b>	<b><u>Not</u> <u>Voting</u></b>
Male: 25	Male: 59	Male: 1
Female: 9	Female: 5	Female: 1

The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban passed 281-142 in the House of Representatives on October 2, 2003. Voting "yes" in favor of the bill were 63 Democrats and 218 Republicans. Voting "no" against the bill were 137 Democrats, 4 Republicans and 1 Independent. Not voting were 5 Democrats and 7 Republicans.

### **Catholic Representatives who voted "no":**

<u>Representative and Party</u>	<u>State</u>
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Joe Baca (D)	CA
Xavier Becerra (D)	CA
Timothy Bishop (D)	NY
Robert Brady (D)	PA
Michael Capuano (D)	MA
Dennis Cardoza (D)	CA
William Lacy Clay, Jr. (D)	MO OR
Peter DeFazio (D)	MA
William D. Delahunt (D)	CT
Rosa DeLauro (D)	TX
Charlie Gonzalez (D)	AZ
Raul Grijalva (D)	IL
Luis Gutierrez (D)	NY
Maurice D. Hinchey (D)	OH
Dennis Kucinich (D)	CT
John Larson (D)	MA
Edward Markey (D)	MO
Karen McCarthy (D)	NY
Carolyn McCarthy (D)	MN
Betty McCollum (D)	MA
James McGovern (D)	MA
Martin T. Meehan (D)	NJ
Robert Menendez (D)	CA
George Miller (D)	VA
James P. Moran (D)	CA
Grace Napolitano (D)	NJ
Frank E. Pallone (D)	AZ
Ed Pastor (D)	CA
Nancy Pelosi (D)	NY
Charles Rangel (D)	TX
Ciro Rodriguez (D)	CA
Lucille Roybal-Allard (D)	CA CA
Linda Sanchez (D)	NY
Loretta Sanchez (D)	CA
Jose Serrano (D)	CA
Hilda Solis (D)	CA
Ellen Tauscher (D)	NY
Mike Thompson (D)	CA
Nydia Velazquez (D)	
Diane Watson (D)	

### **Not voting Catholic Representatives:**

<u>Representative and Party</u>	<u>State</u>
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Kevin Brady (R)	TX
Anna Eshoo (D)	CA
Lane Evans (D)	IL
Henry Hyde (R)	IL
James Walsh (R)	NY

Vote according to Religious Affiliation:

<b><u>"No" vote</u></b>	<b><u>142</u></b>	<b><u>"Yes" vote</u></b>	<b><u>281</u></b>	<b><u>Not Voting</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>
Catholic	40	Catholic	81	Catholic	5
Christian	68	Christian	185	Christian	6
Jewish	25	Greek Orthodox	1	Mormon	1
Mormon	1	Mormon	9		
No Religion	8	No Religion	4		

Vote according to sex:

<b><u>"No" Vote</u></b>	<b><u>"Yes" Vote</u></b>	<b><u>Not Voting</u></b>
Male: 107	Male: 255	Male: 11
Female: 35	Female: 26	Female: 1

Here's a sampling of what Democratic candidates for the presidency said in the wake of President Bush's signing into law the bill that bans partial-birth abortion:

- Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean: "There is no such thing as 'partial-birth abortion' in medical literature."
- Senator John Kerry: "There is no such thing as a partial birth."
- General Wesley Clark: "This bill is

unconstitutional, and it sacrifices the health and safety of American women.”

- Senator John Edwards: “With the stroke of a pen, President Bush just let every women in America know that his political ideology comes first, and her health comes last.”
- Senator Joseph Lieberman: “Today, the President signs into law a bill that lets the political agenda of right-wing Republicans override the rights and health of American women.”  
Here is what other leaders in the Democratic Party said:
- Senator Barbara Boxer: It is “a very sad day for women in America.”
- Senator Hillary Clinton: “This bill is not only ill-advised, it is unconstitutional.”
- Rep. Louise Slaughter: The bill is “a dangerous precedent.”
- Rep. Linda Sanchez: The ban is “dangerous, deceptive and unconstitutional.”
- Rep. Barbara Lee: “Where’s the justice in women dying for no reason?”
- Rep. Carolyn Maloney: “The bill has absolutely nothing to do with so-called late-term abortions or with banning one specific procedure.”
- Rep. Zoe Lofgren: “They made up the name.”
- Rep. Lois Capps: “This procedure is not even found in any medical literature.”



- Rep. Jan Schakowsky: The ban is “harmful to women.”
- Rep. Jerold Nadler: “You will not find the term ‘partial-birth abortion’ in a medical textbook.”

It should be pointed out that the term “throwing up” is not found in medical textbooks also, yet everyone knows what it is. Similarly, partial-birth abortion accurately conveys what doctors politely call dilation and extraction. Perhaps one of the above champions of women can explain what exactly it is that is being extracted. A tooth?

Names count and that is one reason why our side won this battle. No one knows how much names count more than Kate Michelman, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America: “They ran away with this debate in the public domain by constantly describing this procedure.” Michelman is onto something real—knowledge can be a very effective weapon, especially when used against pathological liars.

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## ETHICS CHECK NEEDED

On the morning of October 23, we read an incredible headline in the *New York Times* regarding the decision by Florida Governor Jeb Bush ordering the resumption of the feeding tube for Terry Schiavo. It read, “*Brain-Dead Woman Receives Feeding Tube.*” Brain-Dead? If that were the case, nothing could save her—she’d be dead. Curiously, the first sentence in the story read, “A brain-damaged woman....”

Reporters do not title their work, so the blame goes to the

person who did. Interestingly, the late edition of the newspaper ran the story with the new title, "*Brain-Damaged Woman Receives Feeding Tube.*" When we looked for a correction in the next day's paper, we found none. But there was a correction noted the same day, October 23, on the newspaper's online site. Here's what it said: "A headline yesterday on the continuation of a front-page article about an order to restore the feeding tube of a Florida woman in a right-to-die case misstated her condition in some copies. She is brain-damaged, not comatose."

The "correction" is twice wrong: a) the headline in question did not appear "yesterday," but the same day the correction was issued and b) the newspaper's initial report did not say she was comatose—from which she could have recovered—but "brain-dead."

Looks like the *New York Times* could use an ethics check.