

# CHRISTMAS WARS INGNITE; NEW BATTLE WITH ATHEISTS

The atheists are out in force this year trying to neuter Christmas. But they are being met with stiff opposition from the Catholic League.

The battle lines were drawn early. On November 10, news reports stated that several atheist organizations were seeking to use the Christmas season to garner new recruits. Their weapons of choice: billboards placed on highways and bus shelters, and TV advertisements.

The billboard campaigns run the gamut from the benign to the malicious. Some merely ask those who don't believe in God to join them, but others are a direct assault on Christianity. American Atheists, for example, is currently featuring a billboard with a picture of a nativity scene which reads, "You Know it's a Myth. This Season Celebrate Reason"; it is prominently displayed in New Jersey near the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel that connects to New York City.

As soon as news stories surfaced about the American Atheists' billboard near the Lincoln Tunnel, we were contacted by an anonymous donor who wanted to do something about it. We suggested placing a graphic of a nativity scene on a billboard on the New York side of the tunnel, one that read, "You Know it's Real. This Season Celebrate Jesus." He liked our idea immensely, so we made the arrangements, and he paid for it. This was a very Catholic League kind of rejoinder.

Knowing how aggressive these activists have become in recent years, we were more than ready with a strong response. So on the same day of the news stories about the atheist campaigns, we pulled our trigger: we announced that we had just mailed a Holy Family Nativity Scene to the nation's 50 governors. We quickly heard from Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen, Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell and Alabama Gov. Bob Riley thanking us for the gift.

In his letter to the governors, Bill Donohue explained that it was our "sincere hope that it [the crèche] will be displayed in the Capitol Rotunda alongside secular symbols (e.g., a Christmas tree) this coming Christmas season." It is up to

Catholic League members to follow through by contacting the chief of staff serving their respective governors; the manger scenes were mailed to them.

The atheists are not happy about our counter-campaign. But we are proud that we led the Christian community nationwide with an immediate response. Moreover, unlike their negative campaign, ours is entirely positive. And that is exactly how it should be.

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## **HIGH COURT REVIEW?**

The Thomas More Law Center, representing the Catholic League, is appealing a First Amendment case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2006, with counsel from the Ann Arbor, Michigan legal defense organization, we filed suit against the City of San Francisco after the City's Board of Supervisors passed a non-binding resolution condemning the Catholic Church for its policy against homosexual adoptions.

In that resolution, the Board said that "It is an insult to all San Franciscans when a foreign country, like the Vatican, meddles with and attempts to negatively influence this great City's existing and established customs and traditions, such as the right of same-sex couples to adopt and care for children in need." Of course, the Vatican never meddled in anything: it simply holds a position contrary to the one in San Francisco.

Last June, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit upheld the resolution, but the court later voted to rehear the case before the entire panel of 11 judges. The larger panel voted to reject the lawsuit. However something important to our case happened: of the six judges who addressed the question of government hostility to religion, they split 3-3.

The government is supposed to practice neutrality toward religion. We believe this principle was abridged when the San Francisco Board of Supervisors lashed out at the Vatican. We hope the Supreme Court hears this case and sends an unmistakable message to public officials who voice their

hatred of the Catholic Church.

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# OBAMA, CATHOLICS AND ABORTION

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

William Donohue

When Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973, the Republican Party was the pro-abortion party, and the Democrats were the party of life. There was a very strong WASP presence in the Republican Party at that time, and for many of them, abortion was seen as a way to fix the urban problem. No, they didn't come right out and say it, but racism was clearly a motivating factor. The Democrats, home to Catholics back then, were strongly pro-life. By the end of the decade, the two Parties switched places.

Why this happened had much to do with the McGovernization of the Democratic Party: radical reformers took command and aligned themselves with the cause of feminism; this, of course, meant abortion rights. By the time Reagan became president, the Democrats were fully on board with the pro-abortion agenda. But Catholics weren't buying it, which is why they fled; they've been politically homeless ever since. That's why they are so important: at the national level, the candidate who gets the Catholic vote wins. It happened again last month.

Like many Catholics, I got bounced around because of these changes. I started as a Democrat, then became a Republican and have been happily independent for nearly two decades. In this job, it's much easier for me to be independent: there are times when I have to come down hard on a candidate, and I don't want to have to look over my shoulder because of Party

affiliation. I say this as a backdrop to my concerns over the Obama administration and its dealings with the Catholic Church.

No one questions Obama's abortion credentials. When he was in the Illinois state senate, he led the fight for a bill that would allow a baby born alive as a result of a botched abortion to go unattended. That's infanticide, not abortion. So it came as no surprise that in 2007 he told Planned Parenthood that the first thing he would do upon becoming president would be to sign the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA). Because of opposition, the bill never reached his desk.

There is no question that it was the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that put the brakes on FOCA. It was one of their finest hours. The bishops made it clear that they would not tolerate a bill that could arguably force Catholic hospitals to close: lawyers for the bishops advised that if FOCA were to pass, it would give the government the right to deny funds to hospitals that refused to perform abortions.

Well, guess what? The day after the election, the National Organization for Women issued a statement saying it will fight for FOCA. In other words, the pro-abortion crowd isn't giving up. It is not certain whether Sen. Barbara Boxer of California and Rep. Jerry Nadler of New York will seek to reintroduce FOCA, but if they do, the bishops will have their hands full again.

There's more. The Department of Health and Human Services, led by pro-abortion Catholic Kathleen Sebelius, is currently considering a proposal made by the ACLU that would force Catholic hospitals to perform emergency abortions or lose federal funds. Now imagine for just one moment how this proposal would be playing out if the Democrats had swept the nation the way the Republicans did. Surely, it would have gained much traction, promising yet another showdown between the bishops and the Obama administration. It still might—Boxer

and Nadler were both reelected.

To those who say that such examples are not proof of an anti-Catholic animus in the Obama administration, consider that Dawn Johnsen almost became the head of the Office of Legal Counsel. Johnsen worked on a case in the late 1980s that sought to deny the Church its tax-exempt status (it was the Church's pro-life lobbying that angered her). Last March, I wrote to every member of the U.S. Senate asking them one question: "Are you aware that Dawn Johnsen, who will be voted upon by the full Senate, sought to strip the Catholic Church of its tax-exempt status?" Twice nominated, she finally pulled out because of Republican opposition.

What is it about this administration that makes it so unyielding in its passion for abortion rights? Why is the president so driven by the need to finance abortion, and to seek sanctions against those who don't cooperate? Unfortunately, given the dire straits of the economy, questions like these are not being asked.

In October, we lost a great champion of life, Dr. Mildred Jefferson. The first black woman ever to graduate from Harvard Medical School, she was a tireless defender of the unborn, so much so that the other side refused to have another woman debate her. "I am at once a physician, a citizen and a woman," she said in 2003, "and I am not willing to stand aside and allow this concept of expendable human lives to turn this great land of ours into just another exclusive reservation where only the perfect, the privileged and the planned have the right to live." She died at the age of 84.

It is too bad that our black president could never voice Dr. Jefferson's prophetic words. Worse, it's shameful that his administration is still trying to punish the Catholic Church for its pro-life stance.

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# CATHOLICS DECIDE THE ELECTION

For the past few decades, Catholics have decided who wins elections nationally. After the McGovernization of the Democratic Party in 1972, Catholics were left homeless: they felt betrayed by the Democrats and were leery of the Republicans; they have been up for grabs ever since. On election night in November, they proved once again that of the three major religions in the U.S., they are the ones that count most: Protestants never abandon the Republicans, and Jews never abandon the Democrats.

Catholics voted 58-40 for the Republican candidates. This was a dramatic 20-point swing from two years ago. What caused Catholics to bolt is not clear, but there is one issue that surely played a major role: the out-of-control debt. Practicing Catholics (the others should not be counted as Catholics for polling purposes) understand the virtue of self-denial, and by extension, they value belt tightening at home. What they don't appreciate is promiscuity, be it sexual, fiscal or otherwise.

Michael Sean Winters, a liberal Catholic writer, bemoaned what happened, saying that the Democratic loss meant, "Anti-poverty efforts are off the table." This is cause for celebration: the anti-poverty efforts of the Obama administration have resulted in a poverty rate of 14.3 percent, the highest national rate since 1994. If a jobs-centered economic plan is adopted, the poverty rate will likely decline.

One of the most startling statistics to come out of the election was noted by Catholic activist Deal Hudson. Recall that it was Rep. Bart Stupak, a Catholic Democrat and self-described pro-life congressman, who decided at the last minute to switch sides and vote for the health care bill, knowing that it contained pro-abortion provisions. He decided not to run for reelection, but others who followed his lead—Catholic Democrats considered to be pro-life and then voted for the bill—tried to win another term. But many failed.

Seven House members of the Stupak coalition went down in

defeat: Steve Driehaus, Kathy Dahlkemper, Charlie Wilson, Chris Carney, Paul Kanjorski, Baron Hill and Brad Ellsworth. In all, over 17 pro-life Catholics will be added to the Congress, while roughly 26 pro-abortion Catholics will be departing.

“Perhaps the biggest news of all for Catholics on election night,” says Hudson, “was the emergence of a pro-life Catholic Speaker of the House, Cong. John Boehner to replace Nancy Pelosi, a pro-abortion Catholic.” He’s right. Pelosi had to be summoned to the office of her local Ordinary, while Boehner is proudly pro-life and in good standing in the Church. Leadership matters, so this is an important change.

None of this is to say that practicing Catholics have nothing to worry about. The Department of Health and Human Services is considering a proposal by the ACLU that would force Catholic hospitals to perform so-called emergency abortions or lose federal funding. The bishops, of course, would close the hospitals before ever doing this. Nonetheless, the fact that the Obama administration is even considering such punitive action is troubling enough.

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## **CATHOLICS                      UNITED                      SOWS DIVISION**

Leading up to the election there was a dispute between Catholics United—a dissident Catholic group which sought to criminalize speech—and the Susan B. Anthony List (SBA List), a pro-life group which represented the position of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and had the support of the ACLU. Moreover, Catholics United took a direct shot at the bishops by claiming, in effect, that the USCCB got it wrong when it concluded that abortion funding was contained in the health care bill.

Two years ago, Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput accused Catholics United of doing a “disservice to the Church.” He was

right. The group sought to censor the speech of the SBA List, claiming it misrepresented the record of Rep. Steve Driehaus: the SBA List said that when Driehaus voted for the health care bill, he voted to support “taxpayer-funded abortion”; it sought to launch a billboard campaign alerting voters about this, but was challenged by Catholics United saying that the SBA List was guilty of making “false statements” in campaign advertising. The dispute, which is before the Ohio Elections Commission, has yet to be resolved; if the SBA List loses, it faces criminal charges.

Catholics United said that Francis Cardinal George, the head of the USCCB, got it wrong when he said the health care bill “appropriates billions of dollars in new funding without explicitly prohibiting the use of these funds for abortion.” It further maintains that a unanimous opinion of the legal experts advising the bishops got it wrong when they came to the same conclusion as Cardinal George. And it also claims that the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service got it wrong when it concluded that abortion funding is allowed under the bill.

It is clear that Catholics United wants to muzzle the free speech of the SBA List and is actively undermining the bishops of the United States.

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## **CNN, CATHOLICISM AND GAY MARRIAGE**

A week after the election, CNN was still questioning the role that Archbishop John Nienstedt played in urging Minnesota Catholics not to support same-sex marriage. In a news story posted on its website, CNN claimed that the Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis divided the faithful by urging his clergy to mail 400,000 DVDs on this subject. The cable network also said that this decision raises serious questions about the Catholic Church’s tax-exempt status.

CNN, of course, said absolutely nothing during the fall



campaigns about the aggressive role played by black churches. In one African-American church after another, Democratic candidates were allowed to make a campaign speech; in some cases, they were endorsed from the pulpit. Moreover, CNN said absolutely nothing about the support for gay marriage emanating from some Protestant churches.

CNN provided no evidence that Archbishop Nienstedt has divided the flock. Instead, it quoted Dan Maguire, an embittered ex-priest who has long been at war with the Catholic Church. But it did float the question whether the Church's tax-exempt status was in jeopardy. Obviously, it isn't, because if it were then all those churches and synagogues that support abortion rights would be at risk.

When the Catholic Church endorses efforts to end poverty, or calls for nuclear disarmament, the CNNs of this world never raise a peep. It's just when the Church speaks out in favor of traditional marriage or the life of the unborn that it triggers a hostile response.

Lets be honest, this kind of reporting is designed to rally non-Catholics to object to the role of the Catholic Church in elections

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## **MINNESOTA DEMS EXPLAIN MAILER**

A week before Election Day, a mailer by the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) of Minnesota came under fire for its allegedly anti-Catholic contents. Pictured on one side of the mailer was a priest, shown from his Roman collar down, wearing a button which said, "Ignore the Poor"; on the other side there is a statement critical of Dan Hall, a Protestant minister who is a candidate for the state senate (it said, in part, "Preacher Dan Hall protects politicians—not the poor"). Throughout the Internet, only the front part of the mailer was shown, leading some to accuse the DFL of bigotry. After the mailer began to receive an enormous amount of attention, the DFL released a statement defending the mailing because "the text explicitly criticizes Preacher Hall," and therefore

covered any objections. We weren't buying it.

The DFL deliberately exploited Catholic imagery to make a political point. Had they pictured an imam on the front of its mailing, the DFL wouldn't treat its critics so cavalierly. If the DFL wanted to paint Hall as anti-poor, then it could have done so. But it didn't have to do it by hijacking Catholic imagery. While the text was about Dan Hall, the teaser—that which gets the attention of the reader—was a Catholic-baiting stunt that paints priests as anti-poor.

The person whose name appeared on the mailing was Brian Melendez, the state chair of the DFL. The Harvard-educated lawyer, it turned out, offers his services pro bono for cases involving consumer fraud. Bill Donohue said, "He should therefore know a thing or two about deceptive advertising, especially given that he concentrated in ethics while attending Harvard Divinity School."

We contacted his office looking to give him a chance to explain himself, but he never got back to us. Perhaps he was too busy advising the DFL how to handle questions about deceptive advertising and unethical behavior.

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## **OLBERMANN BASHES CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Right before the election, MSNBC left-wing TV host Keith Olbermann went on an extended rant against Tea Party-backed candidates in several election races, one of his targets was Ron Johnson, candidate for the U.S. Senate in Wisconsin. Olbermann said Johnson "testified against toughening laws on pedophiles and employers who shield them. He argued this could damage a business. A business like the Catholic Church."

Here are the facts. Johnson, a Lutheran, once sat on the finance board of the Diocese of Green Bay. Earlier this year, he testified against a bill that would relax the statute of limitations on cases involving the sexual abuse of minors.

If Olbermann opposes the uniform application of civil liberties—statutes of limitations are central to them—he is entitled to do so, but not without explaining his preference for selective justice. Nonetheless, it is troubling to listen to him indict someone who, in this instance, stood for the rights of the accused. In every state where a bill has been introduced on this subject that applies equally to the private and public sectors, the teachers' unions and superintendents have uniformly opposed them. But Olbermann would never target them.

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## NEW YORK TIMES TWEAKS CATHOLICS

Recently, a blog post published by New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan received a great deal of attention. Dolan called out the *New York Times* for its “gushing” reviews of an art exhibit by ACT UP that features a picture of the late John Cardinal O'Connor resembling a condom (pictured beside him), with the inscription, “Know Your Scumbag.” He also noted its glowing review of a play that mocks Catholicism, “The Divine Sister”; a large crude photo of a cross-dressing homosexual in a nun's habit was also published by the paper.

The producers of the play boasted that their work is “indeed irreverent,” and gossip maven Liz Smith agreed: she wrote approvingly that it is “startlingly vulgar.” Rainbow Sash, a group known for disrupting Mass, berated Dolan for throwing “a public hissy fit,” and for attempting to “censor” expression, merely because he objected to the bigotry.

The paper defended its Catholic bashing by indulging in the following Freudian insight: “While Archbishop Dolan is entitled to his opinions, he might not have liked the intense spotlight cast on the Church when the *Times* extensively reported on the widespread abuse and molestation of children at the hands of the Catholic Clergy.” So that is what was

bothering Dolan—the *Times*' failed attempt to pin the homosexual scandal on the pope last spring, not the newspaper's flagging of anti-Catholic fare!

Bill Donohue was invited to discuss this issue on "Fox and Friends." During his appearance, Donohue said, "The *New York Times* has never found an anti-Catholic TV show, movie, artistic exhibition or play that it didn't like," save, perhaps, for artistic reasons.

That the *Times* now sides with ACT UP, a gay fascist group known for busting into St. Patrick's Cathedral during Mass, throwing condoms in the air and spitting the Host on the floor, shows just how low it has sunk. Dolan was right to slam the *Times*, and we were proud to stand with him. We are happy to report that our friend, Rabbi Joe Potasnik, wrote a letter to the *Times* objecting to this incident.

However, it didn't take the *Times* long to tweak Catholics again. In early November, only a few weeks following Archbishop Dolan's blog post, the *Times* ran a review in its "Arts" section that was just too cute for our liking.

This time it wasn't the photo that was objectionable—a picture of five priests, two of whom are holding hands—rather, it was the intended implication found in the caption below: "A 19th-century photograph of Roman Catholic priests in Danh Vo's 'Autoerotic Asphyxiation,' at Artists Space."

In the accompanying article, all we learn about the photo is that the priests were about to leave France for missionary work in Asia, one of whom was beheaded in Vietnam in 1861 (he was canonized as a saint in 1988). So what gives? How does this photo relate to autoerotic asphyxiation? Seen through the eyes of most men, namely heterosexuals, there is no connecting link. But for some homosexuals, male touching of the most innocent kind always carries a sexual connotation.

For example, the article discusses a homosexual photographer, Joseph Carrier, who bestowed Vo with much of his work. While in Vietnam from 1962 to 1973, "he privately documented the casual interactions he observed, intimate without necessarily being homoerotic, between Vietnamese men." Like shirtless guys hanging out? Who knows?

It is still not clear, at least seen through the lens of heterosexuality, why Vo chose to label his work "Autoerotic Asphyxiation." No matter, it's clear that the *Times* invited

those leafing through the "Arts" section to make the connection between priests and this depraved sexual act.

# U.N. ANTI-BLASPHEMY RESOLUTION IS FLAWED

We recently commented on a U.N. resolution condemning religious defamation that was proposed in November. Here is what we said:

“The Catholic League is an anti-defamation organization that uses such First Amendment guarantees as freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly to protest Catholic bashing. But it is one thing to issue a news release, conduct a letter-writing campaign, call for a boycott or hold a street demonstration; it is quite another to criminalize offensive speech.”

What bothered us most was that this resolution was promoted by member states that are known for disrespecting human rights, including, most spectacularly, religious liberties.

Since 1999, Pakistan has been pushing for this anti-blasphemy resolution. Joined by nations like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the resolution is not a check on religious defamation: rather, it is designed to give Islamist nations the right to plunder the religious rights of non-Muslims—under the guise of fighting religious intolerance!

There is a reason why the Christian community in the Middle East has shrunk to less than two percent of the population—they've been driven out. Just recently, the Syrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad was the scene of violence that left 58 dead and at least 75 wounded. Their crime? They were Catholics.

The Catholic League supports all democratic remedies that thwart religious intolerance, but it will never support fascistic laws. These Muslim nations already kill Christians and Jews with impunity; they don't need any further excuses.