

# CRÈCHES ADORN PUBLIC SQUARE; POST OFFICE BALKS

A front page story in *USA TODAY* got it right when it exclaimed, "From Lawrenceville, Ga., to New York City's Central Park, religious displays are going up on public property as never before." The reference to Central Park was the Catholic League's nativity scene, placed in full public view across the street from the Plaza Hotel. The newspaper article cited the work of the Catholic League as contributing to the increased display of creches on public property during the 1995 Christmas season.

Progress was made in placing nativity scenes in public schools, libraries and parks, though not without a struggle in many instances. The Catholic League, for example, had to threaten a lawsuit against some school districts before creches were given equal treatment to menorahs. Working cooperatively with the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic League was able to monitor the display of creches on public property and respond whenever necessary. Given the success that Long Island Catholic League president Chuck Mansfield had in working with Don Neidhardt of the Knights of Columbus in 1995, the league plans to expand its work with the Knights in 1996 wherever Catholic League chapters exist.

What enabled the Catholic League to score so many victories was the 1995 Supreme Court decision in *Capital Square Review v. Pinette*. That ruling allowed for the Ku Klux Klan to display a cross on the grounds of the Ohio state capitol. As long as religious symbols were privately sponsored, the high court ruled, there was nothing the authorities could do to stop their display. Yet even the decision in *Pinette* was still resisted by many public officials and activist lawyers.

When word got out that the Catholic League had obtained

permission from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to display a creche in Central Park, the New York Civil Liberties Union immediately stated that it would not challenge the league in light of Pinette. But across the Hudson River in New Jersey, the state affiliate of the ACLU threatened to sue Jersey City for displaying a creche. Adding to the controversy was the perennial problem of confusing religious symbols with secular symbols. And no organization was more to blame in this regard than the U.S. Postal Service.

In 1994, the Catholic League protested the U.S. Postal Service regulation that allows for the display of menorahs, but creches, in post offices. The Post Office, the league contended, was in violation of a 1989 ruling, *Allegheny County v. ACLU, Greater Pittsburgh*. In that decision, it was ruled that a menorah was a religious symbol and that a Christmas tree was a secular symbol. In 1995, the league supported a complaint brought by a postal service employee, George Cornwall, against the U.S. Postal Service, but lost when it was ruled that Cornwall had no standing in the case. So this year the league tried a new tactic.

In December, the Catholic League wrote a letter to every Congressman who has anything to do with postal affairs. In the House, the league sent letters to every member of the Subcommittee on Postal Service of the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. In the Senate, the league wrote to every member of the subcommittee on Post Office and Civil Service of the Government Affairs committee. The league is asking for assistance in this matter in getting the U.S. Postal Service to align its policies in accordance with ruling in *Allegheny County*. It has threatened to sue the Post Office if the legislative process does not yield a satisfactory result.

The *New York Times* did not make it any easier for school officials and civic leaders to understand the meaning of the law when it erroneously reported that the menorah is a secular symbol; it compounded matters when it quoted a rabbi who

mistakenly labeled Santa Claus a religious symbol. Whether through ignorance or malice, the same problem appeared in many parts of the country, making it all the more difficult to secure full compliance with the law. But compared to previous Christmas seasons, it was clear that more creches were displayed on public property in 1995 than has been true for many years.

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## EUGENE, OREGON CASE MOVES FORWARD

An anti-Catholic exhibition that was rewarded by the government of Eugene, Oregon last fall has now attracted nationwide attention. The Catholic League has taken its case to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

It was on September 16, 1995 that a group called the "Rickies" staged an anti-Catholic march during the annual Eugene Celebration Parade. As reported in the last issue of *Catalyst*, the "Rickies" received a prize of \$200 for its antics. The "Rickies" included 18 persons dressed in clerical garb and featured an offensive display on the steps of a Catholic church. The Catholic League asked Mayor Ruth Bascom to condemn this government-funded anti-Catholic bigotry, and took out an ad in the *Register-Guard* challenging her to act responsibly. Her response was to do nothing until the local Human Rights Commission ruled on the case.

The commission was scheduled to meet on November 21, but postponed the meeting until December 19. The Catholic League, sensing further uncooperation, then took the issue to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, supplying the Washington-based group

with supporting documentation, which included a video of the march. Just before Christmas, the Catholic League was notified that the U.S. Civil Rights Commission had agreed to accept the case.

In a press release on the subject, the Catholic League stated that "Our patience has run out with Mayor Bascom. All we have ever asked for is a statement condemning government sanctioned anti-Catholic bigotry. We have never pressed for censorship, rather we have asked that the mayor censure the offending group. It is one thing for government to allow Catholic bashing exhibitions in a city sanctioned parade, quite another to reward such bigotry with government funds."

The league awaits further action from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and is delighted with the reaction it has received from Catholics in the Eugene area.

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## THE MAKING OF A PRO-LIFE CONSCIENCE

When Nelli Gray asked me to be a speaker at the 1996 March for Life convention, I was delighted to accept. Nelli has been out in front of the abortion issue for years and has done as much as anyone in the country to keep this issue before the public. Reflecting on what I would say, I kept coming back to the time when I first gave serious thought to the subject.

Prior to *Roe v. Wade*, I had not thought much about abortion. However, soon after abortion was legalized in 1973, I began teaching at St. Lucy's School in Spanish Harlem. As a third grade teacher in El Barrio, I was asked to teach all subjects,

including religion. It was while I was teaching religion that I came to read about abortion and ultimately to form a position on the issue.

As a Catholic, I knew full well what the Church's teachings were on the subject, but as a young graduate student at the time, I wanted to read about all sides of the issue. In the course of doing so, I read about the physical qualities of very young fetuses, the meaning of "unsuccessful" abortions, the contrary positions of Jesse Jackson and a black M.D. from Mississippi, and the consequences of dehumanization. All left a lasting impression on me.

When I read about how soon after conception the organs of the body began to develop, and how the physical qualities that make us human were there from practically the beginning, it seemed plain that the fetus was a child that had not yet been born. To have claimed otherwise struck me as simply dishonest. This being so, it quickly became apparent that the only difference between a fetus and an infant was location, or, put differently, there was no moral difference between feticide and infanticide.

Reading about "unsuccessful" abortions sealed the issue for me even further. An "unsuccessful" abortion, my readings explained, occurred when the baby came out alive. In such cases, doctors and nurses would then try to save the life of the very same baby they said didn't exist just moments before. How the doctors and nurses could live with themselves after all this, I could not understand. It was beyond me how anyone could pretend that abortion wasn't homicide after reading about "unsuccessful" abortions. My students, who at that time were seventh and eighth graders, felt the same way.

In the mid-1970s, Jesse Jackson was still a pro-lifer. So much so that he contended that abortion was a form of genocide against blacks. I remember discussing this with my students, and while I had mixed feelings about Jackson's argument, I

felt Jackson's position was far more plausible than the one that was being promoted by another black professional, a doctor from the Deep South.

In a magazine interview, the M.D. (whose name I do not recall) complained that life was difficult for him growing up as a black person in the Mississippi Delta. No doubt he was telling the truth. But then he added an incredible non sequitur: ergo, legalized abortions were necessary.

It struck me as bizarre that a man who was obviously doing quite well in life—despite his “difficult” upbringing—would now recommend to other blacks, as well as everyone else, the merits of abortion. My students, almost all of whom were black or Puerto Rican, and came from equally troubled circumstances, saw little to admire in the idea that they would have been better off had their mothers aborted them (quite obviously, life was not so bad for either them or the good doctor that suicide was preferable to living). To this day, when I hear that unwanted children should never be born, I see the faces of my St. Lucy's students, and wonder how anyone could dare suggest that they would have been better off dead.

Finally, I remember reading how Albert Speer, one of Hitler's henchmen, could justify killing innocent people. After spending some 20 years in Spandau prison, Speer admitted that though he helped kill massive numbers of Jews, he never had anything against them as a people. When I first read this, it didn't make any sense to me. Was he lying after all these years? Then he explained his behavior by saying, “I simply depersonalized them.”

For Speer, Jews were less than human and were therefore not worthy of human rights. He could not kill a person, but he could kill a Jew. It began to make sense to me.

When I stepped on an ant, I reasoned, I felt nothing. But would I not feel guilt and remorse if I were to step on a

human being, however inadvertently? Surely there was a difference between humans and everything else, and that is why humans must be thought of as human, lest we begin to treat them as non-humans. [For more on this, see the splendid book by William Brennan, *Dehumanizing the Vulnerables: When Word Games Take Lives*, just published by Loyola University Press.]

Many years have passed since I presented these thoughts to my students at St. Lucy's, but nothing has happened to make me change my mind. Yes, abortion is about biology, morality, ethics, philosophy, religion, medicine and law. But it is also about honesty and logic. Unfortunately, these properties are in short supply, and nowhere is this more evident than among those walking around with their advanced degrees.

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## THE LIFELINE FIASCO

Many Catholic League members have called the national headquarters asking for more information regarding our decision to break with LifeLine, the long distance carrier of AmeriVision. What follows should answer any questions left outstanding. But just to set the record straight, please understand that there is another organization that has unfortunately been unfairly confused with LifeLine: it is called Lifeline Systems, Inc. This organization does excellent charitable work and is not to be mistaken for the LifeLine that has earned our wrath.

The memo that follows will explain what happened at the outset of November. But a few things have transpired since that bear mentioning.

First of all, it is not just Catholic Answers that has been found unacceptable to LifeLine, St. Joseph's Radio and

Franciscan University of Steubenville—both strong defenders of Catholicism—have also been rejected. Second, in the original rejection letter sent by LifeLine on July 28 to Catholic Answers, it was charged that Karl Keating's organization "exists to defend the Roman Catholic Faith." Yet in the correspondence that LifeLine has sent to those who have inquired about this fiasco, the word Roman mysteriously appears without italics.

Third, I faxed Carl Thompson, LifeLine's vice president, three memos on November 1, the last of which was explicitly labeled, "Latest Fax." Not only did he not respond to this memo, it is not included in the correspondence that LifeLine is faxing to inquiring persons. Indeed, Thompson's last memo to me, which lacked both a date and a title, now appears dated and with the label "Last Fax" on it. This deliberate tampering with the facts is unconscionable.

I know that many Catholics want to work with Evangelicals and are disturbed by what has happened. I, too, am disturbed—at LifeLine. The Catholic League did exactly what it should have done from the very beginning: we spotted anti-Catholicism and we moved against it. Not to have done so would have been to compromise the mission of the Catholic League for some partisan agenda. That is not the way we operate, as Mr. Thompson (and others) are now discovering.

Many have asked what long distance carrier they should join. It should be understood that the Catholic League is not in the business of trying to hijack LifeLine's business so as to serve some other organization. We are simply reporting the facts as they are. There are other carriers out there, some of which are apparently quite good, but we are reluctant to recommend them for fear of being charged with having an ulterior motive. So the best advice we can give is to do some research yourself (e.g. ask Catholic organizations you admire what service they are using) and then make an informed judgment.



To: Interested Parties

From: Bill Donohue

Date: 11-17-95

Re: LifeLine

There is still confusion among Catholics regarding the feud between the Catholic League and LifeLine. Let me explain why we are urging all Catholics to quit LifeLine.

The problem centers on the refusal of LifeLine to allow Catholic Answers the right to participate in its program because, as stated in a July 28 letter to the organization, Catholic Answers "exists to spread and defend the *Roman Catholic Faith*." In the letter, the person who was said to authorize this decision was LifeLine Vice President Carl Thompson. The person who signed the letter was Marty Dhabolt.

Thompson now denies he authorized this decision. Dhabolt disputes this saying that his boss relayed to him exactly what Thompson wanted in the letter. In any event, Dhabolt has since been fired from LifeLine.

In response to the Catholic League's November 1 news release expressing outrage over this affair, Carl Thompson immediately faxed me a letter saying that Catholic Answers was denied because "we did not, quite frankly, get along very well with those with whom we talked." He said that LifeLine excludes many groups "that we don't feel we can get along with."

In conversations I have had with Dhabolt and Karl Keating, the executive director of Catholic Answers, both have independently said that there were no problems whatsoever between the two groups. Indeed, Dhabolt insists that Catholic Answers was easier to get along with than most groups.

More important, on November 1 Thompson sent a memo to many groups saying that Catholic Answers was denied inclusion

because of the “demands and threats of its leadership.”

On the same day, I faxed a letter to Thompson that addressed both his letter to me and the public memo. I asked him two questions. First, I wanted clarification on something that was confusing to me. In Thompson’s letter to me, he said, in reference to the letter denying Catholic Answers, that “the first paragraph of the letter is accurate.” What was confusing to me was that it was precisely the first paragraph of that letter that was alarming: that was the paragraph that stated Catholic Answers was being denied because it “exists to spread and defend the *Roman Catholic Faith*.” So why would Thompson a) claim innocence from authorizing the denial of Catholic Answers on these grounds and then b) verify that the paragraph in question was accurate?

My second question to Thompson was the most critical: I asked him to please explain what he meant when he charged, in his public memo, that Catholic Answers was denied participation in the LifeLine program because of “the demands and threats of its leadership.”

Thompson never directly answered either question. Instead, he said that he never makes public the reason why any charity is denied inclusion in LifeLine because “I do not want to harm anyone, so I stated it would be better not to say.”

My response to Thompson was to wonder why, if he was not interested in doing harm to anyone, would he say in his public memo that Catholic Answers was denied because of the “demands and threats” that they made? And why is it that we still don’t know the nature of those threats? As I said, “I can think of few things more harmful than to allege that someone has made threats against someone else.”

If, in fact, Catholic Answers was denied because it made threats against LifeLine, then it is incumbent on LifeLine to explain the nature of those threats. But if, as Karl Keating

says, that there were never any threats in the first place (other than the fact that Keating's organization educates Catholics against the "sheep stealers" in the Evangelical community), then Keating has been unfairly maligned and deserves an apology.

Speaking of an apology, it should be known that in Thompson's original letter to me, he said that he would be contacting Catholic Answers to apologize to them and to invite them into the program. But neither has happened.

It is for all these reasons that the Catholic League urges all Catholic subscribers of LifeLine to quit.

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## **HARD ROCK HOTEL PULLS ALTAR**

After responding to pressure brought by the Catholic League, the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino of Las Vegas, Nevada withdrew an offensive altar from its bar. The league mounted a protest of the misuse of a Catholic altar by taking out a half-page ad in the pages of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. The altar was removed on November 27, three days ahead of schedule.

The league involved itself in this case after it had become apparent that the Hard Rock Hotel was not willing to accede to the requests of area Catholics that the altar be removed. By giving the incident publicity, both nationally as well as locally, the Catholic League was able to secure the support of many influential Catholics, some of whom put pressure on Hard Rock to pull the altar. It cost the Hard Rock approximately a quarter million dollars to remove the altar and replace it with some other fixture.

Stephen Cavallaro, the Senior Vice President and General

Manager of the Las Vegas Hard Rock Hotel, had earlier told Dr. Donohue that the altar was not really an altar, rather it was “a wooden object found in someone’s basement.” In his letter to Dr. Donohue explaining the decision to remove the altar, he said that on “November 27, 1995, the antique architecture in the Viva Las Vegas Lounge was fully dismantled and removed.” At last.

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## LEAGUE MEMBERS GET TOM SNYDER’S GOAT

After reading the November *Catalyst*, Catholic League members let Tom Snyder know exactly how they felt about his little Catholic bashing exchange with Cyndi Lauper. Snyder was so incensed about the criticism we dealt him (in his September 12 show, he baited Lauper as she made disparaging remarks about Catholicism) that he called the Catholic League to complain. But he also didn’t help his case very much.

Snyder talked to *Catalyst* editor Susan Fani and explained that he was upset with the negative mail he was getting as a result of *Catalyst* article. He said that he was a Catholic who loves the Church and found the exchange he had with Lauper to be humorous. But then he tried to be cute by rhetorically asking Miss Fani whether black patent leather shoes really reflect up. Snyder also admitted that he baited Lauper, thus confirming our objections.

There is reason to believe, however, that Snyder may have gotten our message. For example, on November 30 Snyder hosted John Laroquette (we’ve had our problems with him as well), and when the subject of Catholicism came up, nothing negative was

said. Also, on December 20, Snyder greeted the anti-Catholic writer Christopher Hitchens, and did not bait him quite the way he baited Lauper. In fact, at one point Snyder said that he had to be careful not to get into this matter (of criticizing the Catholic Church) too much lest he be deluged with the kind of response he incurred when hosting Cyndi Lauper.

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## **ANTI-POPE AD WITHDRAWN AFTER LEAGUE PROTEST**

In early December, AmFAR, the American Foundation for AIDS Research, released several new ads, one of which read, "IF THE POPE HAD AIDS, HE'D NEED MORE THAN JUST YOUR PRAYERS." The ad was scheduled for display on the sides of city buses and other public places in the New York metropolitan area before possibly going nationwide.

The ad drew immediate fire from the Catholic League. The following statement was released to the media on December 5:

"Instead of blaming the Pope, AmFAR should instead congratulate the Holy Father for promoting restraint. Indeed, if everyone followed the Pope's teachings, AmFAR wouldn't exist. It is an elementary truism that if lethal sex acts and drug use were curtailed, so, too, would AIDS. Yet that message is not something that AmFAR has been known to disseminate.

"No private sector institution has done more to service AIDS patients than the Catholic Church: it does more to alleviate the suffering of those with AIDS than all the activist organizations combined.

“Some people’s idea of helping AIDS patients is distributing red ribbons, others choose to blame innocents for the disease, and not a few choose to campaign for more research. The Catholic Church prefers to offer sound advice about the consequences of promiscuity while simultaneously caring for those with full-blown AIDS. That is why it is unique and that is why the Pope is deserving of AmFAR’s emulation, not disdain.”

Shortly after the Catholic League mounted its protest, which was joined by the Archdiocese of New York, the offensive ad was withdrawn. AmFAR, an AIDS activist organization associated with Elizabeth Taylor, publicly stated that it was pulling its anti-Pope ad because it did not want to interfere with its larger message.

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## **GENE BURNS RAILS AGAINST CATHOLICISM**

Radio talk show host Gene Burns is no stranger to the Catholic League as we have had many opportunities to listen to his bigoted attacks against the Catholic Church. On November 10 he was at it again, this time acting as guest host for Ron Owens on KGO San Francisco.

On the program, Burns repeatedly attacked the Catholic Church for its “perverted policies.” “When pedophiles come out of the Roman Catholic Church,” he asked, “does it cause you any surprise? This is a church that has an unnatural policy of asking its clergy and its nuns to be asexual beings, to have no sex life at all. Well, that’s a perverted posture...The human animal likes sex.. If you have a policy, an official policy,

which is itself perverted, does it come as any great surprise that you'll attract a larger percentage of perverts than any other policies?"

Burns continued in this vein by stating that "The Catholic Church's hands are filthy dirty on this subject...Why the code of silence all these decades?...Send all this to the Anti-Defamation League of the Catholic Church as well." At the end of the program he sympathized with a woman caller who was also complaining about the role of women in the Catholic Church. Burns remarked that "This is a boys club," adding that "They're wanting the women of the Church to launder the linens and arrange the flowers while they're diddling their daughters."

The Catholic League will try to arrange a radio debate between Burns and Dr. Donohue.

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## **PBS: MODEL OF BIAS**

PBS has a long track record of biased reporting, so there is no news in reporting that in a show on homosexuality and the Catholic Church, the Church came off badly. "In the Life-Don't Ask, Don't Tell," which was broadcast in New York on December 20, concentrated on the struggle that gays and lesbians face on Catholic campuses. Victim and victimizer were predictably covered in classic PBS style, which is to say that our side lost.

A gay faculty member at Notre Dame University, Professor Matt Jordan, was given a lot of air time to air his discontent with Church doctrine, even to the point of saying that the Catholic Church was "uncomfortable" about sexuality and absolutely "terrorized" about homosexuality.

Professor Jordan could have added that there are also those in the Church who are positively revolted by Catholics like himself, but that view never surfaced. Too bad, because had it done so, it would have allowed PBS to break its own mold.

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## HUGH DOWNS FUMBLES

Hugh Downs should stick to things he does well, like running silly game shows and acting like Howdy Doody on 20-20. However, Hugh wants the public to become acquainted with his intellect, which is unfortunate given what we know about it.

On December 17, Hugh treated his radio audience to a long-winded sermon on what is wrong with the Catholic Church's teachings on ordination. While never speaking in a sarcastic way about the Church's teachings, Hugh nevertheless began to pontificate about "canonical scripture" and why it didn't make sense to him why women can't be priests. But why it made sense for him to discuss matters he knows nothing about is perhaps the biggest mystery of all.

Some fast advice for Hugh: quit while you're ahead and you'll still be remembered for being the male Vanna White of TV (minus the looks, of course).