

CRECHE CONTROVERSIES CONTINUE

In many parts of the country, this past Christmas was marked by conflict over its public celebration. The Catholic League was engaged in battles over the public display of crèches, winning some and losing some.

In Lorain, Ohio, the ACLU threatened to sue city officials for erecting a crèche in Veterans Park; the ACLU director who led the charge is a pastor in a Lutheran church. The ACLU did more than threaten—its sued—officials in Florissant, Missouri for putting a crèche outside the Civic Center. The city of Syracuse, New York, was successful in securing a court order to display a crèche in Clinton Square, but in Jersey City, New Jersey, the city lost in its bid to place a crèche in front of City Hall. Glen Cove, Long Island erected, over much criticism, a crèche in the Village Square; the Catholic League and the Knights of Columbus were active in the cause.

In a memo to public school officials, New York City Schools Chancellor, Rudy Crew, stated that it was acceptable to display such secular symbols as “Christmas trees, Menorahs, and the Star and Crescent.” Upon learning of this development, league president William Donohue phoned the attorney who wrote the memo and asked her to cite the court ruling that determined the secular nature of a menorah. This led to confrontation.

To buttress her argument, the attorney cited the 1989 *County of Allegheny v. ACLU* decision. Donohue informed her that this ruling explicitly makes his case, namely that the court ruled in *Allegheny* that a menorah is a religious symbol. After quarreling, she pledged to research the case further. She later admitted that “there is much merit” to what Donohue said. He will be meeting with her early in the year to discuss a new policy for 1998.

On a positive note, the Catholic League erected a crèche in Central Park (this was the third year it did so) and displayed, for the first time, a crèche in Philadelphia. The crèche in Philadelphia was an especially gratifying experience as it was situated on federal property, across from the Liberty Bell. Cardinal Bevilacqua blessed it on December 18; unfortunately, as we went to press we learned that it was desecrated after the new year. The league asked that it be investigated as a possible bias crime. Plans are to erect another one next year.

SANTA CLAUS CRUCIFIED

In a story that received national attention, the Catholic League protested a painting that hung in the front window of the Art Students League in New York City. The painting, by Robert Cenedella, showed Santa Claus nailed to a cross, hovering over New York. The artist claimed that his work was designed to protest the commercialization of Christmas.

The league asked the executive director of the Art Students League to move the painting inside, to a place that was less conspicuous; the display on a busy street, 57th street, made it difficult for passersby to avoid. Her refusal led to a media blitz over the matter.

The league's objection centered strictly on the misappropriation of the cross. We took no objection to art that protested the commercialization of Christmas, but we also maintained that it was not obvious that the painting conveyed that message. Our point was that the artist could have made the same point by putting Santa in a noose, thus avoiding a conflict with Christians.

What revealed the hypocrisy of the artist was his statement that he would not want to put Santa in a noose because that would offend African-Americans. Yet the same artist had no problem offending Christians by misusing the cross!

Because we never sought to remove the painting from the gallery, we were successful in carrying the argument; public sentiment was on the side of the Catholic League.

NEO-ANTI-CATHOLICISM

There are many genres of anti-Catholicism, the most well-known of which are discriminatory practices against individual Catholics and bigoted assaults on the institutional Church. Both forms continue to exist, but the contemporary strain of Catholic bashing that is most common, if less visible, is best understood as a manifestation of cultural politics.

Culture is an expression of all that constitutes our way of life. Politics speaks to the use of power, exercised by individuals and institutions in society. Cultural politics is the political use of cultural symbols and ideas to fashion, or, more typically, refashion, society according to the vision of those exercising power. It is based on the assumption that changes in the culture precede institutional changes. To put it differently, if we undergo a change in the way we look at the institutions in which we live, then it is entirely possible that we will accept, even demand, changes that fit with our new vision of reality.

Here's an example of what I mean. Today, smoking is prohibited in many restaurants, workplaces and airports. These institutional changes followed a long campaign by anti-smoking forces to change the way Americans think about smoking. The

campaign included a determination by Hollywood to show fewer people smoking on TV and in the movies, educational programs aimed at young people, etc. In short, first we changed our thinking, then we changed our rules and laws.

Here's the connection with today's anti-Catholicism: currently, there is a strong attempt being waged by those who don't like various aspects of Catholicism to change the way we think about our Church, the long-term purpose of which is to get us to accept the kinds of institutional changes that the commandants of the culture want so badly. Though this type of anti-Catholicism is less palpable than previous efforts, its effect is just as lethal.

To be specific, it is the anti-Catholicism that emanates from the entertainment industry, the artistic community and literary quarters that typifies Catholic bashing in the late twentieth century. Sometimes subtle, sometimes not, what makes it different from previous expressions of anti-Catholicism is that this one is less likely to be seen as a frontal assault. But that's exactly why it's so invidious: it's a type of guerrilla warfare being played out on the screen, the canvas and the keyboard.

Many of today's TV shows and movies that discuss Catholicism are not anti-Catholic in the traditional use of that term. But they do qualify as neo-anti-Catholicism insofar as they are a good example of the kind of cultural politics that should concern every member of the Catholic League. When the executive producers of "Nothing Sacred" comment that the purpose of the show is to provoke "dialogue where little exists," it's clear that what is at work is an attempt to alter the way the public, and most especially Catholics, look at certain Church teachings.

This strategy owes a lot to Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci was an early twentieth century Marxist who differed with Marx on how to revolutionize capitalist societies. Marx believed that the

proletariat, the urban working class, would eventually become so exploited that they would band together and overthrow the ruling class. Gramsci put his hope not in the proletariat but in those who took command of the channels of communication. By radicalizing cultural institutions and changing people's values and morals, the way to real institutional change would be paved.

It now makes sense why artists and novelists continue to rail against the Church. Many of them hate the way the Church operates and have special contempt for its teachings on sexuality. They reason that if they can reorient the public's perception of Catholicism, they will have laid the groundwork for the kinds of changes they seek. This is most easily seen in the work of artists and novelists who were raised Catholic, turned against the Church with a vengeance, and are working out their adolescent rage with the fervor of Bible-thumping minister.

What's at stake for us is obvious. These nouveau bigots are quick to wrap themselves in the First Amendment. That's okay—we should respect their right to exercise their freedom of speech against us. But we should not do so lying down. Instead, we should go right at them, using our First Amendment right to expose them for the operators that they are: by unmasking their agenda we can subvert their experiment in cultural politics and send them back to the drawing board. After all, there's no reason to believe why Gramsci should prove to be any more successful than Marx.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER ROE: SLIDING INTO INFANTICIDE

By Rick Hinshaw, Director of Communications

It is now 25 years since the Supreme Court declared unborn children to be non-persons, opening the floodgates to a slaughter of innocent human life unprecedented in our nation's history.

Pro-life people were horrified by *Roe vs. Wade*. They foresaw the mass destruction of pre-born life which it would unleash; and they also warned, as *National Journal* senior writer Michael Kelly recently recalled, "that the widespread acceptance of abortion would lead to a profound moral shift in our culture, a great devaluing of human life."

Senator James Buckley of New York asked on the floor of the U.S. Senate whether America would continue to uphold the "supreme value" of human life, or whether, in the wake of *Roe vs. Wade*, the sanctity of life would be "downgraded to one of a number of values to be weighed in determining whether a particular life shall be terminated?"

Others, however, dismissed such dire warnings, and until recently Kelly counted himself among those skeptics. "Why," he reasoned, "should a tolerance for ending human life under one, very limited, set of conditions necessarily lead to an acceptance of ending human life under other, broader terms?"

Now, however, he has awakened to the clear connection between unrestricted abortion and our growing culture of death—a connection which, sadly, many in our own Church still cannot grasp, as they continue to dismiss abortion as "only one issue". What has finally convinced Kelly that "the pessimists were right"? Let him tell you in his own words (*Washington Post*, 11/6/97):

"On Sunday, Nov. 2, an article in the *New York Times*, the closest thing we have to the voice of the intellectual establishment, came out for killing babies." That's right, he's talking about killing babies *after* birth, as opposed to "terminating a pregnancy" by killing them before birth.

The column Kelly is referring to, by MIT psychology professor Steven Pinker, begins as an examination of the recent rash of killings of newborns by their mothers and, in at least one instance, by the father as well.

While conceding that he is "sensationalizing," but "only slightly," Kelly sees Pinker coming dangerously close to justifying, if not endorsing, infanticide. In Pinker's "modest proposal," writes Kelly, "mothers who kill their newborn infants should not be judged as harshly as people who take human life in its later stages because newborn infants are not persons in the full sense of the word, and therefore do not enjoy a right to life. Who says that life begins at birth?"

A reading of Pinker's column justifies Kelly's alarm, especially when we examine, step by step, the professor's "logic" in trying to define legal personhood.

He begins by dismissing the "anti-abortionists" who "draw the line at conception."

"That implies," he writes, "that we should shed tears every time an invisible conceptus fails to implant in the uterus." So if no one sheds tears at our death, you see, our life never really existed. By that utilitarian logic, there is no inherent value to human life; and our right to live is wholly dependent on the value which other people place on our existence.

Next, Pinker claims that "those in favor of abortion draw the line at viability." Not quite. *Roe vs. Wade* allows states to legalize abortion *up to the moment of birth*, and no less a force than the President of the United States, by his veto of

a ban on partial-birth abortion, has upheld the unrestricted killing of children well past the point of viability.

Yet even this does not go far enough for Professor Pinker, who calls for a re-examination of the presumption that “the line must be drawn at some point before birth.” Instead, he writes, “the moral philosophers say” that “the right to life” must derive “from morally significant traits that we humans happen to possess. One such trait is having a unique sequence of experiences that defines us as individuals and connects us to other people. Other traits include an ability to reflect upon ourselves as a continuous locus of consciousness, to form and savor plans for the future, to dread death and to express the choice not to die. And there’s the rub: our immature neonates don’t possess these traits any more than mice do.”

The logic will be familiar to anyone who has argued the abortion issue: Life has no inherent value. Personhood, and thus one’s very right to exist, are dependent on a range of arbitrary factors—level of consciousness, connectedness to other people, awareness of life and death—that will be defined and determined by other human beings. Indeed, Pinker’s criteria for achieving personhood are very similar to those set forth by Mary Ann Warren in her 1973 essay “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion”: “consciousness,” of “internal” as well as “external” existence; “reasoning”; “self-motivated activity”; “the capacity to communicate”; and “self-awareness.”

Even Pinker’s use of semantics—labeling a newborn child a “neonate” rather than a “baby”—is of a piece with the pro-abortion strategy of dehumanizing the unborn child through the use of terms like “conceptus” or “fetus.”

Of course, Pinker, while not disputing this logic, distances himself from it somewhat by attributing it to unnamed “moral philosophers.” And indeed, what is perhaps most sobering about his column is that the ideas he expresses are *not* new, nor are

they unique to him. They have long been standard fare among some in the intellectual and medical elite, who have advocated infanticide as a logical corollary to legalized abortion.

Dr. Joseph Fletcher, for instance, in his 1979 book, *Humanhood: Essays in Biomedical Ethics*, stated unequivocally that “both abortion and infanticide can be justified if and when the good to be gained outweighs the evil—that neither abortion nor infanticide is as such immoral.”

When would the “good” to be gained by killing a newborn infant “outweigh the evil” of such an act? Well, when the baby had been so uncooperative as not to die during an attempted abortion, for one thing. Such babies should be given neonatal care only if the parents wish them to survive, said Dr. Mary Ellen Avery, chief of Boston Children’s Hospital, back in 1975. “There must be a right to dispose of an infant survivor of abortion,” agreed abortionist Dr. Warren Hern (*Denver Post*, 2/2/77), who has since authored the leading textbook on late term abortion procedures.

Destroying children born with disabilities would be another “good” derived from infanticide. James Watson, Nobel laureate for DNA discovery, declared in 1973 that he would not “declare (a child) alive until three days after birth,” in order to allow for the killing of newborn children with birth defects. His co-discoverer of DNA, Sir Francis Crick, concurred, stating that newborns should have to pass certain genetic tests before being granted the right to live. Geneticist Colin Austin said that personhood should not be declared until some time after birth, to allow for killing the deformed. John Lachs, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that some defective infants are “beings that are only human-looking shapes,” and should be put to death like animals.

University of California attorney F. Raymond Marks, speaking

at the 1976 Sonoma Conference on Ethical Issues in Neonatal Intensive Care, asserted that the state's interest in maintaining the lives of defective newborns was offset by the high cost of keeping them alive. "We would prefer a system that broadly defined a class of infants declared as non-persons who could be disposed of by their parents," he declared.

This brings us back to Pinker's central theme, which is the key link between legalized abortion and legalized infanticide: de-humanizing those whom we wish to kill, in order to deny them legal personhood.

In the Aug. 11, 1969 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Dr. Robert Williams of Washington State Medical School said that he would not consider infants to be persons until near the end of their first year outside the womb, and that until that point he would justify infanticide. Nuclear physicist Winston Duke compared killing an infant to killing a chimpanzee.

In 1979 Michael Tooley, author of "A Defense of Abortion and Infanticide," flatly declared, "Since I do not believe human infants are persons, but only potential persons, and since I think that the destruction of potential persons is a morally neutral action, the correct conclusion seems to me to be that infanticide is in itself morally acceptable."

Mary Ann Warren reached the same conclusion, writing that "killing a newborn infant isn't murder." And, despite her extensive list of attributes necessary for personhood, she ultimately decides that the right to kill a newborn infant depends, like abortion, solely on one factor: whether or not the child is "wanted." "When an unwanted or defective infant is born into a society which cannot afford and/or is not willing to care for it," she writes, "then its destruction is permissible."

Nor have such ideas been consigned solely to the realm of idle theorizing. Even before *Roe vs. Wade* there were reports of handicapped newborns being left to die without medical treatment.

"In 1973 I expressed the concern that abortion of somewhere between a million and two million unborn babies a year would lead to such cheapening of human life that infanticide would not be far behind," Dr. C. Everett Koop, later U.S. Surgeon General, said in a 1977 speech to the American Academy of Pediatrics entitled "The Slide to Auschwitz." "Well, you all know that infanticide is being practiced right *now* in this country...I am concerned that there is no outcry...I am concerned about this because when the first 273,000 German aged, infirm, and retarded were killed in gas chambers there was no outcry from that medical profession either, and it was not far from there to Auschwitz."

Incredibly, Professor Pinker warns in his column that we must establish "a clear boundary" for conferring personhood, lest "we approach a slippery slope that ends in the disposal of inconvenient people or in grotesque deliberations on the value of individual lives." He somehow fails to realize that we have long since begun our descent down that slippery slope, and that his column is itself one of those "grotesque deliberations."

Twenty-five years and more than 30 million deaths later, Michael Kelly is right to be alarmed. *Roe vs. Wade* has brought us to where we stand now. Either we restore protection to the unborn, or ultimately no human life will be safe.

(A shorter version of this article previously appeared in *The Long Island Catholic*)

PIUS XII AD DRAWS RESPONSE

The Catholic League's *New York Times* ad on Pius XII triggered a storm of protest from Jewish readers. The e-mail, phone calls and letters took great umbrage at the suggestion that the Catholic Church was less than complicit in the killing of Jews during the Holocaust. While some of the letters were reasoned, many could easily be classified as hate mail.

The purpose of the ad was to encourage readers to rethink the reigning mythology on the subject. It was not until the 1963 play by Rolf Hochhuth, "The Deputy," that public opinion began to change: the Church that was for more than two decades praised for not being silent was somehow now being blamed for doing nothing, or, worse, being complicit with Hitler.

The league regrets that some people reacted with sheer emotion (complete, in some cases, with obscenities), but trusts that many others have begun to reexamine the issue. Look for more on the role Pius played in the next edition of *Catalyst*.

TRAVELERS TRESPASSES

Travelers Insurance Company trespassed on the rights of Robert Cospito and lost. The Catholic League saw to that.

On December 17, the *New York Times* ran a remarkable story by David Gonzalez on the decision of Travelers to deny further coverage to Cospito on the grounds that his house was a church. Cospito, who lives in Forest Hills, Queens, called his

insurance carrier, Travelers, to send an agent to determine the extent of damages from a leaky toilet. When the agent arrived, he was struck by the way the first floor of Cospito's house had been turned into a chapel. From that he reasoned that Cospito's insurance policy should be cancelled—two days before Christmas, no less—because his home was really a church.

Gonzalez called us to make sure we had seen the story, wondering whether we could do anything about it. William Donohue called the headquarters of Travelers and was given short shrift. When he threatened a lawsuit, they changed their tone.

Donohue was most surprised that a spokeswoman for the company actually defended the decision of the claims agent: it was one thing for someone to make a bad judgment, quite another to have a senior person defend it. To be sure, Cospito's house was not ordinary—he has a flickering red sanctuary light, chalice, missal, altar, tabernacle, statues, a huge organ—but that in no way altered the status of his residence.

When Donohue spoke to a public relations person at Travelers, he got the same brush-off response that he was earlier afforded. Again, Donohue promised that if Travelers didn't do justice right away, the league would bring suit. He soon got the cooperation he sought.

What ultimately got Travelers to move was Donohue's remark that if they didn't reinstate the policy within an hour, he was going to discuss the issue on New York talk radio, galvanizing public opinion against Travelers. The expected phone call was made within twenty minutes.

The league was only too happy to assist Mr. Cospito; he had his policy back before Christmas. The Catholic League's handling of this matter was as appreciated by Cospito as it was respected by Travelers, making everyone satisfied in the

end.

JOURNALISM—FAIR AND UNFAIR

One question the league is often asked is how we make determinations on what we deem to be offensive. Here's a good example of how the process works.

This past fall, the *Dallas Morning News* ran a story, "Crimes of the Father," on a death row prisoner in Arkansas. It showed a picture of the man holding a rosary bead that was draped around his neck. The cutline under the photo read, "Darrel Hill, on Arkansas' death row, wears a crucifix that was worn by friends on the row who were executed." We had no problem with that, but we did raise an objection when the story and photo ran a few weeks later in the *Florida Times-Union*.

Under the photo in the *Florida Times-Union*, it read, "Darrel Hill, on Arkansas' Death Row, believes he inherited his criminal tendencies from his father, and passed them on to his son, Jeffrey Landrigan, who is on Death Row in Texas." The headline read, "What makes a human kill?"

The problem with the Florida newspaper is that it gave the impression that there was some inherent connection between the criminal's Catholicism and his crime. We wrote to the editor of the *Florida Times-Union* explaining how the *Dallas Morning News* handled the story fairly. We also said that in his paper "the picture is gratuitously displayed under a sensational headline, creating an immediate link which is nowhere dispelled."

The contrasting accounts is the difference between professional and tabloid journalism. It's also the difference

between informing readers and needlessly offending Catholics.

POPE'S VISIT TO CUBA

Media coverage of Pope John Paul II's trip to Cuba began over a month before the actual encounter of the pope and Fidel Castro. Already there were those drawing comparisons between the two men.

Perhaps the most frequently heard unfair comment is that both men are dictators. But a dictator is one who oppresses the masses and punishes those who seek to flee his reign. The pope's message is one of freedom and he has no desire to punish anyone who wants to leave the Church. Castro, on the other hand, has spawned a message of oppression, torturing and imprisoning those who work against him, denying the Cuban people the right to emigrate abroad. And when it comes to freedom of religion, the contrast between John Paul II and Castro could not be more different.

Our media watch report on the Holy Father's trip will appear in the next *Catalyst*.

GOBER ART DRAWS DEFENDERS AND CRITICS

Last October, the Catholic League sent a letter to the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and

a news release to the media, stating our objections to a piece of art by Robert Gober (see November *Catalyst*). Gober's work showed a phallic culvert pipe piercing Our Blessed Mother, the purpose of which, he said, was to deprive "the Virgin Mary of the womb from which Christ was born."

The Gober has since been defended by Richard Koshalek, the museum's director, the *New York Times* and the *National Catholic Reporter*. Koshalek has said that Gober's work "is intensely personal, and installations he has created have dealt with controversial issues that are important to him, such as sexual identity, racial prejudice, bodily functions and the Catholic faith."

It can also be said that Gober, who is an embittered gay ex-Catholic, is part exhibitionist, otherwise he would have no need to publicize his "intensely personal" work. We just wish he would do it behind closed doors and leave his creations there, preferably next to the garbage can.

The *New York Times* likes this trash so much that it offered a color photo of Gober's masterpiece. But the best part was the story by Roberta Smith. It was so good of her to note that "it is understandable that some people might find the piece upsetting," even if all they saw was a photograph of the subject. Her condescending attitude then burst forth with her comment that "it is depressing to be reminded, once more, that there are always those who know what they don't like, even if they haven't actually experienced it." But it's not half as depressing as knowing that she gets paid to write this stuff.

Smith insists that critics of Gober must be offended firsthand before they can object. "Because the Gober is about the literal and the actual," she opines, "it is profoundly experiential and even interactive, a journey that must be traveled before an informed opinion can be arrived at." Such logic suggests that suffering must be experienced before an informed opinion can be made. But if this is true, then it

would be wrong to oppose famine, disease and genocide without first experiencing it. Such a claim would be irrational because it would effectively end all future experiential journeys.

From a writer for the *National Catholic Reporter*, art professor Linda Ekstrom, we get nothing but praise. "In fact," the professor says, "Gober's work is one of the more challenging and profoundly sacred spaces I have ever encountered in an art venue." That gives us some idea where she hangs out. We have a suggestion for her: why not take Gober's phallic culvert pipe and stick it through the head of Moses head and see what happens. Or try Martin Luther King on for size.

The league was delighted to learn that approximately a thousand protesters jammed the sidewalk in front of the museum to let Gober know what they thought of creation; it was led by the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, a traditional Catholic group. The league sent copies of its news release and a letter of support to be read at the rally.

BBC PUT ON NOTICE

As soon as the Catholic League learned that the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was planning on starting a cable station in the U.S., William Donohue wrote a letter to John Birt, Director General of the BBC, expressing his concerns.

The BBC, Donohue said, produced the movie, "Priest" (it was distributed by the Disney owned firm, Miramax) and was weighing the option of bringing its anti-Catholic TV show, "Father Ted," to the U.S. Donohue said he hopes the BBC will

bring the best of what it does to the U.S. and leave behind gems like these. He added that he hopes he does not have a reason to write to Birt ever again.