

HOUSE CHAPLAIN POST DEMANDS SCRUTINY

The quest for a new House chaplain began in June, 1999 when an 18-member committee of Republicans and Democrats sifted through almost 50 resumes. After interviewing 17 candidates, and selecting six as semifinalists, the top three names were submitted to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, House Majority Leader Dick Armey and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt; they were permitted to name any one of the finalists.

Their choice was Rev. Charles Wright, a Presbyterian minister. Rev. Wright placed third in the committee voting, however, the three that made the final selection claims not to have known about this. The committee's first choice was Rev. Timothy J. O'Brien, a Catholic priest and professor at Marquette University. Gephardt, a Democrat, voted for Father O'Brien; the two Republicans, Hastert and Armey, voted for Rev. Wright, citing his superior pastoral experience.

The Catholic League's initial response was to write to every member of the House asking them to reexamine this matter when it comes to him for a vote on January 27. Our concern was as follows:

"When Father Timothy O'Brien was vetoed as House chaplain, the central question left on the table was the reasoning that the House leaders employed when they rejected the overwhelming advice of their colleagues.

"To say that most members of the House would be more comfortable with a Protestant minister than with a Catholic priest—which is precisely what Dennis Hastert and Dick Armey are reported as saying—is to say that Catholic priests need not apply for this post. As Hastert and Armey know, never in the history of the U.S. has there been a Catholic priest

chosen for House chaplain. This raises the question, If not now, when?"

What bothered the league most of all was the line of questions that the Republicans asked of Father O'Brien. Questions that probed whether a Catholic priest's Roman collar might be seen as divisive by some congressmen were inappropriate, we insisted. So were questions that probed whether a single, celibate priest could adequately counsel family members.

After receiving the letter from the Catholic League, Rep. John Dingell called for the full disclosure of all the records relating to the selection of the new House Chaplain; the league publicly supported him in this effort.

A letter from Rep. Dick Armey to William Donohue relieved some of the league's concerns, but still left other questions unanswered.

CANDIDATES ADDRESS RELIGION

The presidential campaign is off and running and already the Catholic League has entered the fray. In December, the league defended candidates from both parties on the subject of religion and politics.

Presidential candidates George W. Bush and Gary Bauer were defended by William Donohue when they both invoked the name of Christ in a nationally-televised debate. In a news release, Donohue said that "it is dangerous to assume that the mere invocation of God's name, or some recitation of faith, will lead us down a scary road where church and state will merge." He labeled such tactics as "pure demagoguery, designed to intimidate those who believe in the public expression of

religion.”

Donohue asked, “Would those who are upset with George W. Bush and Gary Bauer for citing Christ as the ‘political philosopher or thinker’ with whom they most identify with be just as upset had they answered Ayn Rand, the high Objectivist queen of atheism? Would those who have no problem marketing their anti-religion message in the public schools be just as upset had a candidate invoked the name of Hillel or Buddha?”

Donohue also praised Al Gore and George W. Bush for supporting faith-based social service institutions. “Those with an agenda to eradicate all vestiges of religion from the public square,” he said, were “the real threat to our freedoms.”

The league will continue to address such issues without aligning itself with either party.

Quotable:

After listening to William Donohue comment on the double standard that surrounds Catholicism and politics, Chris Matthews, on *Hardball* (MSNBC, Dec. 15) had this to say: “You know what you are, Bill? You are my gut talking.”

THE MANY FACES OF PREJUDICE

William A. Donohue

Most of us can easily identify prejudicial statements when

sweeping generalizations of a negative kind are made. But prejudice has many faces, and not all of them are readily apparent. Take the “Dateline” example that is mentioned in this issue of *Catalyst*.

Does the Catholic Church have dirty laundry? Of course. What institution or group of people doesn’t? Furthermore, it is the right of the media to uncover wrongdoing whenever and wherever it occurs. So what was so wrong about “Dateline’s” exposé of a Catholic-operated mental hospital in Quebec in the first half of this century? Aside from the decision to air this segment at Christmastime, there is the question, “Why?” Why was this story chosen for investigation in the first place? After all, it had no legs to it that made it of contemporary interest.

As I said in my letter to NBC, many viewers might like to see a “Dateline” exclusive on babies born alive in abortion clinics; or a segment on who’s funding Rev. Al Sharpton; or a story on the legalization of torture in Israel; or a piece on the gay contribution to AIDS.

When I asked a senior NBC official whether “Dateline” might consider doing any of these stories, he was non-committal, purposely leaving the door open. But he knows as well as I do that “Dateline” would *never* consider airing any of these stories. And not just “Dateline”: is there anyone who really believes that Mike Wallace would do a “60 Minutes” piece on any of these subjects?

What the media decide to investigate, and what they choose not explore, involve value judgments. The decision not to air the dirty laundry that exists in the abortion industry—doctors and nurses running around with a baby that is alive but is supposed to be dead—is a value judgment. Not to unmask whose dole Al Sharpton is on is a value judgment (he has no reported income). Not to tell the American public, which generously gives money to Israel, about that country’s legal use of torture—in the 21st century—is a value judgment. And not to

explore why reckless gays should not be treated the way we do smokers—with stigma, and by holding them accountable for promoting certain diseases—is a value judgment.

Another example of prejudice occurs when cultural observers get more exercised over those who oppose bigotry than they do about bigotry itself. In this regard, Kinney Littlefield is a perfect example.

Ms. Littlefield writes a weekly TV column for the *Orange County Register* in Southern California. To put it mildly, she hates the Catholic League. That doesn't make her unique, but what does distinguish her from other boob-tube experts (imagine telling your grandchildren that what you did for a living was watch TV all day) is her anger at reverent portrayals of Catholicism.

This past fall, NBC aired a movie "Mary, Mother of Jesus," that was produced by JFK's sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver and son Bobby Shriver. Littlefield acknowledged that the film was anything but anti-Catholic, but that was just the problem: it should have been.

Littlefield not only objected to the high revenue that NBC stood to gain by airing this film, she was worried about something else. "More crucially—and perhaps dangerously—it is smooth, seamless infotainment, crafted to sell the Shriviers' personal view of Christianity and Mary's role in it." Well, now, that's really saying something: it is dangerous to offer a movie that Christians might like. Shame on Kate O'Beirne for not making this her "Outrage of the Week" on the Capital Gang!

"Mary, Mother of Jesus," Littlefield writes, "should help Donohue and cohorts relax. It delivers the kind of safe, secure view of Catholicism they require." Borrowing from her lens, it could also be said that the reason she likes movies like "Dogma" is because they deliver the kind of bigoted, trashy view of Catholicism she requires. Different strokes for

different folks.

Oh, yes, as the year ended, Littlefield mention us again. “The conservative Catholic League—not affiliated with the Catholic Church—castigated Kevin Smith’s crude but compassionate film ‘Dogma’ for debasing the Catholic faith.” It was so good of her to red flag our “conservative” nature to the reader (in the same piece she provided no adjective when describing either the NAACP or the Anti-Defamation League). And it was intriguing to learn that “Dogma” was at once both crude and compassionate (I’ll have to speak to Pat Scully about this—it must have gotten by him; I know it got by me).

As for the matter of us not being affiliated with the Church, Littlefield is wrong. Now that it’s the year 2000, it’s time to come clean: the Catholic League is a mole within secular society hired by the pope to impose the teachings of the Catholic Church on America. And the world, too. And beyond. When are we landing on Mars?

JOHN P. HALE: R.I.P.

On December 11, 1999, American Catholics lost a good one when John P. Hale died in Larchmont, New York. He was a member of the Catholic League’s board of advisors and former special counsel to Catholic Charities of the New York Archdiocese.

Jack was a distinguished attorney who worked tirelessly to defend the Catholic Church from defamation, putting himself at the service of John Cardinal O’Connor. He also worked hard to ensure that our society was not corrupted by social and educational programs run by sexual ideologues. In this regard, Jack was best known for his valiant effort in defeating New York’s “Rainbow Curriculum,” the gay sex-ed pedagogy that

promoted books like *Heather Has Two Mommies*.

On a more personal note, Jack Hale was the one person who was most responsible for notifying me that the Catholic League was looking for a new president and CEO in 1993. I had met Jack a few years earlier in New York City at a debate I had with Ira Glasser of the ACLU. He knew of my interest in coming back to New York and made it his goal to assist me in any way he could.

“DOGMA’S” CURIOUS FANS

The movie “Dogma” didn’t do too well at the box office—after 12 weeks it pulled in a measly \$27 million—but the critics, being for the most part critical of the Catholic Church, liked it. Indeed, some loved it so much they voted it one of the ten best movies of 1999. Among “Dogma’s” fans were priests.

Father John Kirwin, pastor of St. John’s/St. Ann’s Church in Albany, New York, criticized Catholic League president William Donohue for not understanding “the art of caricature.” “I am inclined to think that caricature lends itself to being better understood on the screen than on the page,” he wrote in Albany’s *Times Union*, “and yet Donohue based his stand only on a reading of the script.” Father Kirwin also said that the film was seen by the league as “a mockery of the things they hold sacred,” making plain his stand that what we hold sacred is not what he holds sacred.

In the pages of the Catholic journal *Commentary*, movie reviewer Richard Allewa boasted, “I liked the movie’s insolence,” noting that his favorite scene was the “muse-angel turned stripper” who chews bubble gum “while dancing on top of a bar.”

“END OF DAYS” IS TORTUOUS

When the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie “End of Days” was released, the Catholic League wasted no time blasting it. Indeed even “Entertainment Weekly” branded the movie the “Loser of the Week.” Here is how the Hollywood magazine put it: “The Devil. Not only does he pummeled in End of Days—which has been beaten at the box office by a middle-aged spy and a bunch of toys—his movie’s getting trashed by the Catholic League. It hasn’t been this bad since getting kicked out of heaven.”

Our trashing was explained to the media this way:

“The gory scenes of violence and torture are sickening, but what is most troubling is the crass misappropriation of Catholic themes and imagery. Moreover, several priests are brutalized—even to the point where a would-be killer priest is crucified on a ceiling by Satan. There is a vacuous pope, pathetic-looking cardinals, lay Catholic thugs in rebellion against the Vatican, Satanic worshippers, etc. Suffice it to say that the film is tortuous in more ways than one.

“The film’s director, Peter Hyams, classifies his movie as ‘pro-religious.’ This, of course, is exactly what advocates for Andres Serrano have been saying for years about his ‘Piss Christ’ contribution. It is what the fans of Terence McNally have said when challenged about the playwright’s ‘Corpus Christi.’ It is what the supporters of the Brooklyn Museum of Art exhibition, ‘Sensation,’ have been saying for weeks about Chris Ofili’s ‘The Holy Virgin Mary.’ And it is precisely what Kevin Smith offers when questioned about ‘Dogma.’

“This dishonesty suggests that it is better to be labeled a

con-man than a bigot. Why they don't come out of the closet and expose themselves for what they are is distressing. Perhaps the Catholic League should stage a coming-out party for these guys. The problem is we'd probably have to rent the Los Angeles Coliseum."

Dennis Nilsen reviewed the movie for the Catholic League.

RASH OF ANTI-CATHOLIC ADS IN MAJOR NEWSPAPERS

From November 28 to December 22, ten major American newspapers carried anti-Catholic ads. All of the ads were sponsored by the Eternal Gospel Church of Seventh-Day Adventists (a splinter group from the Seventh-Day Adventists). The ads identified the Catholic Church as the "WHORE" and the "BEAST," and charged the Holy Father with breaking down the barriers between church and state.

The "Earth's Final Warning" full-page ads were run on November 28 in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; on December 1 in the *Miami Herald* ; on December 1 in *El Nuevo Herald*(Miami); on December 2 in the *Dallas Morning News*; on December 5 in some copies of the *Greenville News* (South Carolina); on December 10 in the *Indianapolis Star*; on December 13 in *Diario Las Americas* (Miami); on December 14 in the *Los Angeles Times*; on December 20 in the *Tallahassee Democrat*; and on December 22 in *The Herald* (Everett, Washington).

The official position of the Catholic League, as released to the media, was as follows:

"This is not the first time that we've had problems with the

anti-Catholic ads run by the Eternal Church Gospel of Seventh-Day Adventists. Our experience has been that when we register our complaint with the publishers of the newspapers which accepted the ads, they proved to be uniformly reasonable.

“Despicable though the ‘Earth’s Final Warning’ ads are, they are not half as disturbing as the decision of newspaper advertising executives to run them. It is not likely that the Klan would find space in a mainstream American newspaper, and the same should be true of the Eternal Church Gospel of the Seventh-Day Adventists. The Catholic League is determined to fight these ads every time they appear and to convince as many publishers as possible as to the impropriety of running them.”

We are delighted to say that the *Miami Herald*, *El Nuevo Herald*, *Diario Las Americas*, *Dallas Morning News*, the *Indianapolis Star*, the *Greenville News*, *The Herald*, the *Tallahassee Democrat* and the *Los Angeles Times* all made quick and sincere apologies to the Catholic League, pledging never again to run these ads. In fact, when the publisher of the *Greenville News* spotted the ad in print, he ordered the printing press stopped and thus not all copies of the South Carolina daily published the ad.

Deserving of special mention is attorney Charles Helms, president of the Dallas chapter. He was successful in his efforts to extract an apology from the *Dallas Morning News* and in getting them to agree to run a column by him explaining the chapter’s objections.

We are awaiting a response from the other newspapers. The Eternal Gospel Church of Seventh Day Adventists is currently being sued by the Seventh Day Adventists for misuse of their name.

CATHOLICS RIPPED ON SITCOMS AND DRAMAS

In mid-December, within the space of three days, three network television shows featured lines that were offensive to Catholics.

In the December 13 episode of the CBS sitcom, "Becker," there was a segment about a Christmas pageant that revolved around Joseph and Mary. Dr. Becker, played by Ted Danson, at one point told the man dressed as Joseph, "You told the 'Virgin Mary' she had a nice ass, didn't you?"

In the December 13 episode of the NBC show, "Suddenly Susan," employees were complaining about their Christmas party. "These drinks are totally watered down," said one character. To which it was said, "I get a better buzz during Communion."

In the December 15 episode of the NBC show, "West Wing," the subject was hate crime legislation. A discussion took place about the murder of a gay man in the mid-west by three young men. "They made him say Hail Marys as they beat him to death," said a character. She then commented how this crime was really about "racism, or sexism or anti-Semitism or homophobia that are only the tip of the iceberg of the pathology troubling this country."

The Catholic League told the media "all of these attacks were done intentionally and were timed to offend at Christmastime."

CATHOLICISM IN AMERICA

Joseph Varacalli is an astute observer of the American Catholic scene, and in his new book, *Bright Promise, Failed Community: Catholics and the American Public Order*, he describes how and why Catholic America has essentially failed to shape the American Republic in any significant way.

Varacalli turns his sociologically-trained eye to uncovering the reasons why American society never truly experienced a "Catholic moment." But he is not a pessimist: he identifies how a revitalized, orthodox community could serve as the carrier of Catholic social doctrine.

The book is available from Lexington Books at 1-800-462-6420 for \$45 plus shipping.