

GREELEY ON CLINTON

When asked by TV host Paula Zahn when he thinks about President Clinton's sexual behavior in the White House, Father Andrew Greeley rose to the president's defense saying "we've done an appalling amount of harm to the American political structure by trying to criminalize his private behavior." When Zahn asked, "But it that his fault or ours?", Greeley remarked "Again, I'm not going to judge what the president did privately. It's certainly our fault for taking his private life and making it a public issue."

Previously in the interview Father Greeley defended gay marriages.

HATE CRIMES AT CHRISTMAS

Christmas 1999 will be remembered for the unusually high number of desecrations that took place around the country. Vandals and arsonists had a field day: hate crimes ranged from robbing baby Jesus from the manger to setting fire to the body of Christ on a crucifix. In many of these instances, the police declared the acts to be hate crimes. Here is a sampling of what happened.

- Seven statues of the Christ child were stolen from lawn Nativity scenes at churches and homes in Oradell, Dumont and Emerson, New Jersey.
- Almost all the statues in a Nativity scene were stolen from Fontbonne College in St. Louis.
- In Brooklyn, there was a series of incidents the were reported to the police. A statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary which had stood outside the

front door of Our Lady of Refuge Rectory since the early 1930s was smashed to pieces; a statue of baby Jesus was also destroyed. Beer bottles were thrown through a huge stained-glass window at Holy Innocents. The body of Christ was taken down from the crucifix at Holy Cross Church and burned. Statues of Our Lady of Fatimas and the three young seers were pulverized in front of St. Jerome's; they had stood for nearly four decades.

- In Day Island, Washington, the entire Nativity scene was stolen.
 - In St. Albans, West Virginia, baby Jesus was stolen.
 - In Chicago, baby Jesus was stolen from a Nativity Scene in Daley Plaza.
 - In Meredith, New Hampshire an infant Jesus figurine was stolen on two occasions in one week.
 - In Galveston, Texas statues of the Virgin Mary were stolen from lawns and cemeteries all over the town.
-

HOLOCAUST COMMISSION BEGINS

In December, an international team of Catholic and Jewish scholars met in New York to discuss how they will carry out their mandate to study 11 volumes of World War II-era material the Vatican published between 1965 and 1981. The panel was announced by Seymour D. Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, and Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, chairman of the Vatican's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews.

The three Catholic scholars are: Eva Fleischner; Father Gerard

Fogarty; and Father John F. Morley. The three Jewish scholars are Michael R. Marrus; Bernard Suchocky; and Robert Wistrich. All have published in the area.

Father Morley has been critical of the work of Father Peter Gumpel, the Jesuit who is promoting the cause of sainthood for Pope Pius XII; Father Morley has labeled Father Gumpel's work "biased." And at the time of the first meeting, Father Fogarty said, "We should look back and at least acknowledge what we have done wrong. One of the greatest obstacles to Christianity in our time is, unfortunately, Christians."

ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

A new book that Catholic League members will not want to miss is now available from Our Sunday Visitor. *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture* is a series of essays which includes the Center for Media and Public Affairs' newest report on media coverage of the Catholic Church. The book is edited by Robert Lockwood, former president of the publishing division of Our Sunday Visitor, and now the Director of Research for the Catholic League. Here are some of the book's highlights:

- The seven anti-Catholic assumptions common to the American experience
- The sordid account of an anti-Catholic diatribe that has been a best selling "religious" title for more than 155 years
- Why the role of women is a flash point for criticism of the Church
- How the focus of anti-Catholicism has changed radically

from the 1960s to the 1990s

- Ways priests are simultaneously depicted as sexually repressed prudes and licentious perverts
- How the secular media ridicule Catholic teaching under the guise of freedom of speech
- Comprehensive analysis of media coverage of the Catholic Church from 1963 – 1998
- Twelve practical ways to improve relationships with the secular media that actually work, by William A. Donohue, President of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

Anti-Catholicism in American Culture is available from OSV for \$19.95 plus shipping and can be ordered at 1-800-348-2440.

ISRAEL BANS CHRISTMAS

Had it not been for Pope John Paul II, the Cuban people would still be barred from publicly celebrating Christmas. Now he needs to bring his message of tolerance to Israel as well.

This past Christmas all crucifixes and Christmas trees were banned from Israeli hotel lobbies because they were deemed offensive to Jews. It wasn't the prime minister who did this, nor was the legislators in the Knesset. It was Chief Rabbi of Israel Meir Lau who issued the edict. And this was a compromise!

Some rabbis have wanted to ban Christmas and New Year's celebrations outright. But the hotel and tour operators in Israel have been fighting the rabbis, saying it would cost

them money by losing Christian guests. So in stepped the Chief Rabbinate with his compromise: Christians could only celebrate Christmas behind closed doors.

In actual fact, however, even this compromise didn't work. A manager of a leading hotel chain told reporters that "We could not put up a Christmas tree or hang decorations from in the foyer. We have been allowed to put aside a private room, out of sight, for anyone wanting to celebrate the New Year." However, even this concession was rescinded in 1999.

New Year's celebrations were also suppressed. Because New Year's Eve fell on the start of the Jewish Sabbath, no cooking, no lifting food and no music was allowed. Hotel operators were warned that they would have their kosher food certificates revoked if they allowed New Year's Eve parties. And Handel's Messiah was cancelled because the Finance Ministry wouldn't pay for security.

Moreover, fundamentalist Christians in Israel who believed that Jesus's second coming was imminent were deported as were Irish pilgrims who wanted to visit holy sites.

In a Gallup poll published at Christmastime, three out of four Israelis could not identify the date of Christmas and nearly two-thirds said they did not have a single Christian friend. Just under half said they either did not care about the pope's planned trip to Israel or were hostile to the idea.

HATE MAIL FANATICS

We certainly get our share of hate mail at the Catholic League. Sometimes the author identifies himself, while others prefer to remain anonymous. One anonymous fanatic sent us 24

pages of e-mail on December 23. Over 6,000 times he simply wrote "F- THE POPE!!!"

Now that takes some work. Imagine the psychological gears this guy has working for him—he could cruise at any speed. We don't know what business our obsessed friend is in, but it would be a shame if he missed his calling and isn't working in the arts.

P.S. Since he signed his name William of Orange and used NO POPE OF ROME for his address, it's a sure bet he's not an atheist. Those of us who are Irish at the Catholic League took special note of this inscription.

HATE CRIME DATA

In November, the FBI released its annual report on hate crimes. The media gave much attention to the fact that racial prejudice was the number-one motivating factor behind hate crimes in 1998. What was ignored almost entirely was the fact that prejudice over religion came in second, beating out hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation. Of the 1,720 victims of religious prejudice, more than 67 percent involved crimes against property.

The media silence on crimes motivated by hatred of religion is part of a disturbing pattern: when gays are victimized it qualifies as a national story, but when churches are vandalized it is treated as a local occurrence. This bias is not the result of a conspiracy, rather it is part and parcel of the ideological mind-set that colors the media. It just comes with the territory, so to speak.

CHRISTMAS CONTINUE

CONTROVERSIES

The old battle between those who want crèches and menorahs on public property and those who don't was fought again in December 1999. In Somerset, Massachusetts a coalition of residents got together to remove a nativity scene and a menorah from the grounds of the Town Office Building. The group was an assembly of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish clergymen opposed to mixing secular symbols with religious ones so as to pass constitutional muster.

In Jersey City, New Jersey, Mayor Bret Schundler lighted a menorah in front of City Hall and later erected a crèche; earlier in the year, a federal appeals court took his side in a dispute with the ACLU that has been going on for five years.

In Wall, New Jersey, the ACLU lost again in its bid to stop a Christmas/Hanukkah display in front of the municipal building.

In Fairfax County, Virginia a federal appeals overturned a local law that prevented a woman from erecting a manger scene outside a Fairfax County government center. "The victory is mine," said a triumphant Rita Warren, "it's for God and the people who can go to the government center and see the First Amendment work."