

VICTORY IN VACCO

On June 26, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Vacco v. Quill* upheld the laws in New York and Washington state that make it illegal for doctors to assist in the suicide of their patients. The decision said that “the New York statutes outlawing assisted suicide neither infringe fundamental rights nor involve suspect classifications.” The court added that “The distinction between letting a patient die and making that patient die is important, logical, rational, and well established.”

Just as important, the high court reaffirmed the reasoning of the New York law when it emphasized the necessity of “maintaining [the] physicians’ role as their patients’ healers; it also said that the New York law protected “vulnerable people from indifference, prejudice, and psychological and financial pressure to end their lives.”

The league’s response was as follows:

“The Supreme Court acted with great jurisprudential wisdom in upholding laws that prohibit doctor-assisted death. It fully recognizes the clear line that exists between allowing a patient to die and forcing a patient to die. It also affirms the status of physician as life-saver, not as life-taker. Regrettably, the high court does not apply this logic to abortion, for if it did, it could not argue that doctors who help to kill unborn babies are somehow flexing their constitutional muscles.

“Those who were most opposed to doctor-assisted death, namely the undereducated, the elderly, minorities, the handicapped and the poor, are the biggest beneficiaries of this decision. The only losers are those who interpret liberty as including the right of doctors to kill their patients and those who see the most vulnerable segments of our society as little more

than human rubbish.”

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ OFFENDS CATHOLICS

On May 31 and June 1, the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) was host to the performance of a comic opera, “Sisters of the Visitation.” The performance ended a month-long series of events celebrating the inauguration of the new chancellor of the school, Dr. M.R.C. Greenwood. The opera involved a reckless young man and his servant, both of whom sneak into a convent dressed as a priest and a nun in order to stop a young woman from receiving her final vows; the “priest” and the “nun” are involved in secret trysts.

According to a description provided by UCSC, the opera “is a hilarious comedy of errors as well as revelations about secret goings-on within the convent.” Another description says it pokes “gentle fun at the formality of religious orders.” The play was originally written at the time of the French Revolution and has been reconstructed by a faculty member.

On May 19, William Donohue wrote to Dr. Greenwood asking her to reschedule the opera “for a time during the academic year that is less prominent.” She refused to do so saying that it was determined that the opera “would cause little or no discomfort,” adding that “any anti-clerical humor would clearly be seen in its dated context.” However, she did see to it that certain changes in the play were made. Not satisfied, Donohue issued the following comment to the press:

“Dr. Greenwood thinks that ‘Sisters of the Visitation’ is okay because the harm done to Catholics is minimal and the audience

that will see it will be sufficiently urbane to see the 'anti-clerical humor' in its historical context. Then why not schedule a few outdated stabs at women of color, Jews, gays, Native Americans, Indonesians, Japanese, Chinese, Mexicans and Filipinos? I mention these groups because each of them was, or will be, the subject of a reverential tribute during the inaugural ceremonies. Indeed, there has even been a memorial prayer and meditation for Jews. Dr. Greenwood's duplicity is evident to every fair-minded person."

When the league's statement hit the press in Santa Cruz, the media forced Dr. Greenwood to explain herself. The result was that the play was amended to remove the most offensive parts. "We have attenuated some of the anti-clericalism in the spoken dialogue," said Miriam Ellis, the stage director.

The league is pleased that some changes were made but still insists that the production should never have been launched. It speaks volumes about the university's commitment to multiculturalism that several other groups in society were treated with nothing but reverence while Catholics were held up to scorn.

CONFUSING RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

The *Statesmen Journal* of Salem, Oregon, recently ran a lengthy front-page story on a young Hispanic girl who was about to receive her First Holy Communion. Of course, the article had much more to say than simply report on the experiences of the young girl. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that the real purpose of the story was to blame Catholicism for the

allegedly poor academic record of Hispanic youth.

On the front page, the story, which ran in the Sunday, May 18 edition, featured a color photo of the young girl in her Communion dress, along with eight other color photos of Catholic children, their parents and priests. What was disturbing about this “news” story was the way editorial remarks were interwoven in the piece.

We learned, for example, that First Holy Communion initiates Catholic children into “a culture of selflessness and devotion that, in some children, discourages individual striving.” The next sentence said it all: “The results can be disastrous to education.”

In reply, William Donohue challenged the assertion that the family-oriented nature of Catholic rituals had had a negative effect on the academic achievement and life chances of Hispanics. “But if this were so,” he said, “then how does one explain that a) non-Hispanic Catholics are second only to Jews in educational achievement and b) Hispanics who attend Catholic schools outperform their public school cohorts?”

NUNOGRAPHY “NINETIES STYLE”

Our lead story on Cinnabon and Bongo Java are only two instances where commercial establishments have sought to market their products by using nun figures. Other examples of this trend include the selling of “Fighting Nuns” (a toy with boxing gloves), Squeak Toy Nun (it squeaks when squeezed) nun dolls and comic strip characters. The first two items have not been a source of controversy, but the latter two certainly have.

Blessings Expressions of Faith, a Michigan-based company, is selling nun dolls. Unlike other nun dolls on the market, these dolls are made in the exact image of nuns in habit and there is nothing disrespectful about the way they are dressed or poised. Yet that didn't stop the National Coalition of American Nuns from denouncing the dolls and calling for a boycott.

Apparently, it was not the way the dolls were made that the coalition of nuns objected to, rather it was the fact that they were made by men. "Right away, it just kind of hit us: Here it is, men making money off women again," is how Sister Beth Rindler put it.

What makes this protest even more interesting is that it comes from a group of nuns who don't accept many Church teachings. For example, according to *Our Sunday Visitor*, the National Coalition of American Nuns rejects "religious habits, as well as the authority of the Pope and bishops" and is pro-abortion, pro-women priests and anti-canon law; it also asks Catholics to stop giving to the Church until it ends "sexism." [Editor's note: it is not certain whether these nuns are also opposed to second collections that support retired nuns.] The coalition's website lists in great detail why it rejects so many of the Vatican teachings.

Though the league does not find these dolls objectionable, it does object to the comic strip characters that appear in the Warrior Nuns comic strip, a product of Antarctic Press. The creator of these comic strip characters, Ben Dunn, says there is "nothing wrong" about his creation and insists that his characters show that "a nun can look nice." Dunn's idea of a nice looking nun is most clearly represented by his famous comic book character, Areala. Leslie Miller of *USA Today* describes Areala costume as a "tight-fitting bodice and thigh-revealing" comparable to the "buxom, scantily clad" characters found in other comic books. Pamela Long of Religious News Service notes that Dunn's characters sport "a

considerable amount of décolletage and body-hugging leather, and the skirts are frequently split to the waist, revealing leather boot and red underwear”; Dunn says that the side slits are “for mobility.”

A review of the comic book supports these descriptions. Sister Areala, Sister Shannon Masters, Shotgun Mary and Warrior Nun Dei, are shown as sexy violent nuns who brandish pistols to ward off the enemy. According to Dunn, he is trying “to portray a world in which nuns have had to become soldiers in defense of their faith.” Yet on his web site, it says that Sister Shannon is questioning her “loyalty and faith.” Indeed, it even says that some Catholics are attacking the Warrior Nuns and that a “mysterious agenda” could “bring the Vatican itself crashing down.” Catholic League members can write to publisher Ben Dunn at Antarctic Press, 7272 Wurzbach, #204, San Antonio, Texas, 78240.

While we’re at it, readers should know that *Nunsense II*, a play based off the original *Nunsense*, is now playing in Hoboken, New Jersey. The promotional for the sequel says that “From the very opening to the ‘gospel-style’ finale, the Little Sisters with their wacky antics and peppy songs prove once again that *Nunsense can be habit-forming*.” Finally, Catholics in Rochester, New York can purchase the services of a “Reverend Mother” to entertain them. “Sister Phyl Contestable” of *Nunsense* fame will deliver “Reverend Mother” to your door. As advertised, “She’ll roast your boss or surprise Granny!” The ad says that the “Reverend Mother” is suitable for Birthdays, Bar Mitzvah’s and other events.

Our members might like to know that we saw the ad for renting the “Reverend Mother” in the *Catholic Courier*, the official newspaper of the Rochester diocese; a phone call to the paper found that the ad has been running for years. Question: do you know of any Jewish newspaper that runs Rent-a-Rabbi ads for Holy Communion parties?

MAD MAGAZINE PAINTS PRIESTS AS PERVERTS

In the April and May editions of *MAD* magazine, Catholic priests were portrayed as child molesting homosexuals. The April edition had a priest preaching from the pulpit asking parishioners to help pay for the millions that the Church has had to pay in lawsuits to cover the cost of “priests who have molested young boys.” In May, the magazine stated that virtually all priests are homosexuals and therefore they wouldn’t be offended by a Disney movie like “Priest.”

The Catholic League commented to the press on this issue as follows:

“This is not the first time that *MAD* has attacked Catholicism. Like Howard Stern, *MAD* is intent on projecting the very worst stereotype of Catholic priests. And like Stern, the publication holds to the same double standard: both are on record saying that they would never do ‘victim humor,’ yet both have a strong interest in victimizing priests.

“John Ficarra, co-editor of *MAD*, recently said that ‘There are still many lines we wouldn’t cross,’ offering by way of example the self-imposed taboo against victim humor and AIDS jokes. Quite obviously, Ficarra feels that he hasn’t crossed the line by bashing Catholic priests.

“It is never innocent fun to defame an entire class of people because of the behavior of a few. The fact that *MAD* honors this tenet with regard to gays but not priests suggests that it feels quite at home playing the role of bigot when the subject is Roman Catholicism.

“The league will convey its concerns to *MAD* but it has no high hopes that it will persuade the publication to treat priests the way it treats gays. For if that were to happen, it would mean that *MAD* would have to explain to its parent company, Time Warner, why it has ceased to engage in Catholic-bashing, and that would take some explaining indeed.”

SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE WON'T LET GO

It is one thing for *Saturday Night Live* to engage in satire, quite another to single-out a religion for scorn by regularly featuring a character that ridicules it. Such is the case with the character Mary Katherine, played by Molly Shannon. And guess which religion she likes to mock?

Shannon poses as a Catholic schoolgirl, wearing a very short plaid skirt, freaky glasses and a headband. It was the executive producer, Lorne Michaels, who decided on the abbreviated skirt, described by *Entertainment Weekly* as “hiked to the heavens.” This explains why Shannon often exposes her underwear. And while performing, Shannon is known to say such things as “Sometimes when I get nervous I touch my boobs...”

Now if all this is just good fun, why is it that we don't see any other religion mocked as often as Catholicism? Sure, we have the symbols galore, but that hardly explains why some in Hollywood have this strange—indeed perverse—fetish with our religion.

PENNSYLVANIA PLAYHOUSE TRIMS SCRIPT

In May, a playhouse in the suburban Pittsburgh town of Cranberry, the Comtra Theatre, yielded to pressure and amended many parts of a script that the league found objectionable. The play, "Once a Catholic," supposedly portrayed the confusion and awkwardness of Catholic schoolgirls who discovered their sexuality in the 1950s. But the script went far beyond any cute statement about the travails of puberty.

Parts of the play have young people discussing men who engage in anal sex and sex with camels. Other characters comment on a pope having sex with prostitutes, as well as his with own daughter, while still others remark about the practice of Mary's husband, Joseph, who is said to have stirred his tea with his penis.

When the league was contacted by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* about the play, immediate action was taken. William Donohue spoke to the woman who operates the club, Marie Teets, and demanded that the play either be canceled or that the script be substantially changed. Teets said she had already made some changes and that she would make any other changes that the league wanted.

Once the league obtained a copy of the script, Teets was contacted again. While she had already pulled much of what the league wanted withdrawn, there were still other parts that were objectionable. We are pleased to say that every part of the script that the league protested was removed.

The league is satisfied with the outcome.

ABORTION ISSUE HITS COLLEGE CAMPUS

A small Catholic college in Indiana has responded to a complaint lodged by the Catholic League that seems to guarantee that it will pay more attention to its Catholic status in the future.

The league was notified by one of its members that the school newspaper refused to run pro-life ads on the theory that it then felt obliged to accommodate pro-abortion groups as well. Here is the text of the letter sent by Dr. Donohue to the college's president.

"It has come to my attention that the editor of *Shavings* has refused to run any future ads by the anti-abortion group, Birthright. The alleged reason for doing so is that to accommodate Birthright, pro-abortion groups like Planned Parenthood must be accommodated.

"Having spent some 16 years as a college professor at a Catholic college, I know how utterly fallacious such reasoning is: private schools are under no obligation to do any such thing. Even public institutions of higher learning may make their own editorial decisions regarding these matters.

"As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, I have just one question: will [school's name] keep this same policy next year or will it allow Birthright the right to place its ads without extending space to such groups as Planned Parenthood?"

In a letter from the president of the college, he said that it is the policy of his college "to accept advertising from

Birthright and not to accept advertising from Planned Parenthood.” He also indicated that “The action of this student editor was purely her own and was called to our attention after the decision had been made and no corrective actions were possible. Our college administration does not condone this action, but at the same time, there was little that could be done about it after the fact.”

The league is satisfied that the college got the message. But it is disturbed to think that no faculty oversight was maintained over the newspaper.

BETHANY DEFENDS PLAY

In the last *Catalyst*, we reported that Bethany College allowed the performance of the anti-Catholic play/movie, *Agnes of God*. The league sent a letter to the president of the school, Dr. D. Duane Cummins, stating its objections and calling into question the propriety of a Christian college (Bethany is affiliated with the Disciples of Church) sponsoring an anti-Catholic play.

When the league received no response, a phone call to Dr. Cummins was made. He said he had been advised not to respond to our complaint because it had been determined (by whom?) that the play was not anti-Catholic. He also said that there were no problems attendant to the performance and that as far as he was concerned, it was a dead issue.

Well, it's not a dead issue for the league. That is why we wrote to the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities, the school's accrediting body. We stressed that it was our hope that this organization “will give due consideration to this incident when Bethany's multicultural

curriculum is being reviewed during the next accreditation process.”

By the way, one of our members, who is also an alumnus of Bethany, wrote a stinging letter to Cummins blasting the school for its anti-Catholicism. It just so happens that Bethany previously performed *Sister Mary Ignatius*, one of the all-time worst Catholic-bashing plays. Members can write to the president at the college; the address is simply Bethany, West Virginia 26032.

VIEWER ALERT: WATCH FOR ABC’S “NOTHING SACRED”

ABC, which is owned by Disney, is scheduled to unleash a show about a priest this fall that already has garnered the league’s concern.

The priest in “Nothing Sacred,” Father Ray (played by Kevin Anderson), is described by *Entertainment Weekly* as an “irreverent priest who questions the existence of God, feels lust in his heart, and touches people’s souls.” The *Tampa Tribune* says that the priest “faces a corrupt parish and self-doubt.” From the *Orange County Register*, we learn that the show stars an “iconoclastic priest with a prodigiously sinning parish.”

Once the league learned of the show, we immediately contacted ABC. We were told that only one show had been cut. But we also received ABC’s promotional statement about “Nothing Sacred.” Here is what it says:

“It’s tough being a priest in the ’90s, just ask Father Ray

(Kevin Anderson). In one morning alone, he has nearly been fired for advising a pregnant teenager to follow her own instincts. He has had to turn down a bribe in the confessional, even though he's desperate for money to keep his church afloat. His college flame has just walked back into his life and reignited old passions. And now his mentor is asking him to deliver a sermon proving the existence of God. How should he know if God exists?...he hasn't even finished the book yet!

"On a daily basis, Father Ray struggles with sacrificing his own personal goals and desires for a parish that commits every sin in the proverbial book. The truth is, the humanity that makes him susceptible to temptation and self-doubt is the very same humanity that sets him apart as one of the most accessible and loving priests around. He's been cursed with a God-given gift for touching people's souls. If only Ray could find God to soothe *his* soul."

Here is where you can direct your concerns: Ms. Nellie Hadden, Director of Broadcast Standards & Practices, ABC, 77 West 66th St., New York, New York 10023. You might tell Ms. Hadden that if she believes that the show is not irreverent, then why don't they substitute a Jewish rabbi or a black minister for Father Ray.