

RELIGION AND POLITICS: BISHOPS SPEAK WITH CLARITY

When the bishops recently assembled in Colorado, they overwhelmingly approved a policy statement on “Catholics in Political Life.” Presented on June 18, the position that the bishops staked out on what to do about pro-abortion Catholic politicians was greeted with enthusiasm by the Catholic League.

From our point of view, the bishops spoke with convincing clarity on the subject of politics and religion. Though there are many public policy issues that Catholics are rightfully concerned about, none is more important than the killing of innocent human life. That is why this statement, which gives priority to abortion, is so important: it says that issues like the minimum wage are morally inferior to abortion. As a corollary, it also suggests that shutting down a soup kitchen is not morally analogous to shutting down an abortion clinic. That this even needs to be said shows how morally bankrupt many Americans, including Catholics, have become.

The statement also shows due respect for the autonomy of the bishops. The question of denying Holy Communion to pro-abortion politicians is something every bishop should decide for himself. It needs to be said that it is one thing to get the bishops to agree on the immorality of abortion—that’s easy—but it is quite another to get a group this large to agree on the right remedy for lawmakers who violate this teaching.

The Catholic League was delighted to learn that the statement dealt directly with Catholic institutions that honor pro-abortion public figures. For too long, Catholic colleges and universities have bestowed honors on those who have worked overtime to advocate abortion rights, including partial-birth

abortion. They would never honor someone associated with anti-Semitism or racism, but when it comes to abortion, too many have let radical feminists on the faculty rule the day.

The bishops also did not dodge the phony argument over church and state. “The separation of church and state does not require division between belief and public action, between moral principles and political choices, but protects the right of believers and religious groups to practice their faith and act on their values in public life,” is how the bishops put it.

“That remark,” we told the media, “is cogently written and without a single flaw.” Our recommendation was, “It should be widely disseminated to public officials and the law schools.”

PLEDGE CASE VICTORY

Last year, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights filed a joint friend-of-the-court brief with the Thomas More Law Center supporting the right of public school students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The June 14 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, though made on grounds that the plaintiff lacked standing, upholds the constitutionality of the Pledge.

It is too bad that the substantive issue of whether recitations of the Pledge in school are legal wasn't addressed. But it was understandable that the high court would scrutinize the right of Michael Newdow, the devout atheist who brought the case, to speak for his non-custodial daughter.

It is regrettable that this issue wasn't put to bed once and for all. And that is because there is a concerted effort in this country, led by organizations that are openly hostile to

religion, to eliminate all public vestiges of our religious heritage. This movement, which is at root totalitarian, seeks to impose a radical secular agenda on all Americans. It must be stopped dead in its tracks if religious liberty is to survive.

Even if the win wasn't exactly what we wanted, it is important to remember that we didn't lose—the other side did. Here's what we told the press the day the decision was reached: "This is not a good day for the radical secularists. Which is why it is such a good day for everyone else."

THE TRIUMPH OF THE BANALITY OF EVIL

William A. Donohue

If you haven't read [pages 8-9](#) yet, please do so before reading this article; it will facilitate what I'm about to say.

The late philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote brilliantly on the causes of totalitarianism, especially as it occurred in Nazi Germany. Perhaps her most memorable phrase—used to describe the way in which Germans became almost immune to human suffering—was the "banality of evil."

That phrase applies equally well today to describe what is happening in America.

To intentionally kill an innocent child who is 80 percent born is not only evil; it is Satanic. The American Medical Association, which is steadfastly in favor of abortion rights, has admitted that partial-birth abortion is *never* needed to

save the life of the mother. Yet thousands of these abortions take place every year in the United States.

The late senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was “pro-choice,” but he drew the line at partial-birth abortion: he properly called it infanticide. Ditto for Ed Koch, the former mayor of New York City. So why is it that so many other abortion-rights public figures continue to defend a procedure that is so barbaric that it rivals anything done by the likes of Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Mao, Idi Amin or Saddam Hussein?

While it is true that most Americans are opposed to partial-birth abortions, it is also true that most give it little attention. One reason for this is media bias: it has been well established that the media elite are almost unanimous in their support for abortion-on-demand. So much so that media insiders like Bernie Goldberg and others have admitted that it is extremely difficult for a pro-life person to get hired in any position of influence in journalism or the broadcast industry. Given this monopoly of thought, it is no wonder why “60 Minutes,” or any of the other TV magazine-type shows, will ever do a segment on partial-birth abortion. Wouldn’t it be great to learn what the hospitals and clinics do with the “remains”?

If that’s too gruesome, wouldn’t it be great if “Dateline” interviewed the very same doctors who are mentioned on pages 8-9? Or how about ABC’s Diane Sawyer? Would she bring that same pained look on her face—you know, the one she flashed when interviewing Mel Gibson—to work when asking the doctors what kind of scissors they like best? Wouldn’t it be instructive to learn how these monsters manage to sleep at night?

The banality of evil really shines through when these doctors are asked about the pain that the baby feels. Not only do they not have a clue—they don’t want to know. That’s because it’s not their job. Their job is to deliver a dead baby—and maybe put a cap on the kid’s head before slipping him into one of

their little coffins.

Their answers are so icily cold as to be scary. These are well-educated men and women who were trained to help the sick. And what they do for a living is to kill the kids. Is it because the money is good? Maybe it is, but surely they could make lots of money treating people's feet. No, what they elect to do tells us something about the way they see the world: they are servants, trained to deliver a service. Just like prostitutes, only the ladies of the night don't have to learn how to use a suction tube.

This may come as a surprise to you: not one nation in the world has more liberal laws governing abortion than the United States. Every European nation—including the sexually liberated Scandinavian countries—has some restrictions on abortion. We have none. We know this because a few decades ago a member of the Catholic League's board of advisors, Mary Ann Glendon, revealed this dirty little secret in a book she did on the subject. The Harvard law professor was herself surprised to learn that the U.S. has the most promiscuous laws on abortion of any nation on the face of the earth.

There are plenty of issues in this election season for voters to consider, and it makes no sense to focus on one to the exclusion of others. But it also makes no sense to treat issues like the environment, housing and the minimum wage as the moral equal of infanticide. Yet that is what many Catholics, including members of the clergy, are urging us to do. It is important that their quest for moral equivalency be resisted.

All of this is very troubling, and not simply because it is immoral to jam a scissors into a little baby's head and then suck out the boy or girl's brain. It is troubling because of what it does to the rest of us. It allows us to retreat—to escape into ourselves. It coarsens us. It promotes the fiction that we can each carve out our own universe, complete with our

own morality. In short, such nihilism is deadly in more ways than one.

JUSTIFYING INFANTICIDE

After President Bush signed a law banning partial-birth abortion last year, Planned Parenthood and the rest of the abortion industry sued to have the law overturned. This past spring, several doctors who have performed such abortions testified before judges in various parts of the nation. The following is an excerpt of their remarks.

The Procedure

April 5, 2004: Excerpts from cross-examination of Dr. Carolyn Westhoff:

Q. And at that point the fetus' body is below the cervix and the neck is in the cervix with the head still in the uterus, right?

A. Yes.

Q. And it's at that point that you take a scissors and insert it into the woman and place an incision in the base of the fetus' skull, right?

A. Yes.

Q. Now the contents of the fetus' skull, just like the contents of my skull and your skull is liquid, right?

A. That's right.

Q. And sometimes after you've made the incision the fetus' brain will drain out on its own, right?

A. That's right.

Q. Other times you must insert a suction tube to drain the skull, right?

A. That's right.

Q. And then the skull will collapse immediately after its liquid contents have been removed and the head will pass easily through the dilated cervix, right?

A. That's right.

April 2, 2004: Testimony of Dr. Carolyn Westhoff:

Q. Do you tell her [the mother] that you are going to then, ultimately, suck the brain out of the skull?

A. In all of our D&E's the head is collapsed or crushed and the brains are definitely out of the skull but those are—

Q. Do you tell them that?

A. Those are details that would be distressing to my patients and would not—information about that is not directly relevant to their safety.

April 1, 2004: Judge Richard C. Casey and Dr. Timothy Johnson, plaintiff:

Casey asked Johnson if doctors tell a woman that an abortion procedure they might use includes “sucking the brain out of the skull.”

“I don't think we would use those terms,” Johnson said. “I think we would probably use a term like ‘decompression of the skull’ or ‘reducing the contents of the skull.’”

The judge responded, “Make it nice and palatable so that they wouldn't understand what it's all about?”

“We try to do it in a way that's not offensive or gruesome or overly graphic for patients,” Johnson said.

The Goal

April 6, 2004: Excerpts from Government's cross-examination of Dr. Mitchell Creinin:

Q. If the fetus were close to 24 weeks, and you were

performing a transvaginal surgical abortion, you would be concerned about delivering the fetus entirely intact because that might result in a live baby that may survive, correct?

A. You said I was performing an abortion, so since the objective of an abortion is to not have a live fetus, then that would be correct.

Q. In your opinion, if you were performing a surgical abortion at 23 or 24 weeks and the cervix was so dilated that the head could pass through without compression, you would do whatever you needed to do in order to make sure that the live baby was not delivered, wouldn't you?

A. Whatever I needed, meaning whatever surgical procedure I needed to do as part of the procedure? Yes. Then, the answer would be: Yes.

Q. And one step you would take to avoid delivery of a live baby would be to deliver or hold the fetus' head on the internal side of the cervical os in order to collapse the skull; is that right?

A. Yes, because the objective of my procedure is to perform an abortion.

Q. And that would ensure you did not deliver a live baby?

A. Correct.

How the Baby Reacts

April 5, 2004: Excerpts from direct examination of Dr. Marilyn Fredriksen:

The Court: Do you tell [the woman] whether or not it will hurt the fetus?

Fredriksen: The intent of an [abortion is] that the fetus will die during the process of uterine evacuation.

The Court: Ma'am, I didn't ask you that. Very simply I asked you whether or not do you tell the mother that one of the ways she may do this is that you will deliver the baby partially and then insert a pair of scissors in the base of the fetus' skull?

Fredriksen: I have not done that.

The Court: Do you ever tell them that after that is done you are going to suction or suck the brain out of the skull?

Fredriksen: I don't use suction.

The Court: Then how do you remove the brain from the skull?

Fredriksen: I use my finger to disrupt the central nervous system, thereby the skull collapses and I can easily deliver the remainder of the fetus through the cervix.

The Court: Do you tell them that you are going to collapse a skull?

Fredriksen: No.

The Court: The mother?

Fredriksen: No.

The Court: Do you tell them whether or not that hurts the fetus?

Fredriksen: I have never talked to a fetus about whether or not they experience pain.

April 1, 2004: Judge Richard C. Casey, Dr. Timothy Johnson, plaintiff:

"Does the fetus feel pain?" Judge Richard C. Casey asked Johnson, saying he had been told that studies of a type of abortion usually performed in the second trimester had concluded they do.

Johnson said he did not know, adding he knew of no scientific research on the subject.

The judge then pressed Johnson on whether he ever thought about fetal pain while he performs the abortion procedure that involves dismemberment. Another doctor a day earlier had testified that a fetus sometimes does not immediately die after limbs are pulled off.

"I guess whenever I..." Johnson began before the judge interrupted.

"Simple question, doctor. Does it cross your mind?" Casey pressed.

Johnson said that it did not.

"Never crossed your mind?" the judge asked again.

"No," Johnson answered.

Proof that the Baby is Alive

March 29, 2004: Testimony of Dr. Maureen Paul:

Q. And when you begin the evacuation, is the fetus ever alive?

A. Yes.

Q. How do you know that?

A. Because I do many of my procedures especially at 16 weeks under an ultrasound guidance, so I will see a heartbeat.

Q. Do you pay attention to that while you are doing the abortion?

A. Not particularly. I just notice sometimes.

April 2, 2004: Testimony of Dr. Cassing Hammond:

Q. And you have observed signs of life in the fetus, didn't you?

A. That is correct.

Q. You have seen spontaneous respiratory activity, right?

A. Yes.

Q. Heartbeat?

A. Yes

Q. Spontaneous movements?

A. Yes.

The Burial

March 31, 2004: Dr. Amos Grunebaum:

Grunebaum said doctors used to hide the fetus from women after an abortion before studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s showed that women grieved less after a failed pregnancy if they get to see the fetus.

"It is the same as any baby dying. People want to hold the fetus," he said, adding that he goes so far as to put a cap on

the head of the fetus just as he would for a newborn.

April 5, 2004: Excerpts from cross-examination of Dr. Fredrik Broekhuizen:

Q. Doctor, you testified earlier that sometimes parents want an intact fetus for blessing or burial. Have you ever had the parent express that desire where you had compressed the head of the fetus to complete the delivery?

A. Yes.

Q. Was anything done in those instances, doctor, to improve the appearance of the fetus' head after decompression?

A. Yes.

Q. What was done?

A. The fetus was—just like a newborn—it was dressed and kind of had a little hat placed on it so only the face was visible.

Q. You have seen the fetus' leg move before crushing the head, haven't you?

A. I have seen that before compressing/decompressing the head.

April 2, 2004: Testimony of Dr. Carolyn Westhoff:

A. Because it is the back of the skull that collapsed, since this is not disfiguring, and the face, for instance, is intact. Several of my patients have wished to hold the fetus after the procedure and have expressed gratitude that they were able to do so.... We have arrangements to permit burial of the fetus if the patients want.... Because the hospital also has small coffins present, both for stillbirths or for fetuses after a termination, and in the case of our D&E patients we actually have little hats available so we could in fact cover the back of the head where the incision had been made.

KERRY'S "RELIGION OUTREACH" DIRECTOR QUICKLY SILENCED

It took less than a week for the Kerry camp to silence Mara Vanderslice, its Director of Religion Outreach.

This intriguing story began when the Catholic League broke a news story on June 14. The following statement by the league explains how the process unfolded:

"Here's what we know about John Kerry's religious outreach person. Mara Vanderslice was raised without any faith and didn't become an evangelical Christian until she attended Earlham College, a Quaker school known for its adherence to pacifism. When in college, Mara was active in the Earlham Socialist Alliance, a group that supports the convicted cop killer Mumia Abu-Jamal and openly embraces Marxism-Leninism. After graduating, Mara spoke at rallies held by ACT-UP, the anti-Catholic group that disrupted Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1989 by spitting the Eucharist on the floor. In 2000, she practiced civil disobedience when she took to the streets of Seattle in a protest against the World Trade Organization. In 2002, she tried to shut down Washington, D.C. in a protest against the IMF and the World Bank.

"At first, John Kerry was considered too moderate for Mara, which is why she became Howard Dean's Religion Outreach Director. She admits that she was a freak in the Dean campaign: her colleagues dubbed her the 'church lady,' informing her that Dean was liked precisely because he didn't talk about religion. 'How in the world did you get hired?' is how one staffer put it. Unfazed, Mara contends we have a 'collective commitment to protect the integrity of God's creation,' specifically citing the needs of the 'least of these.' Yet she supports John Kerry, a man who has never learned of an abortion he couldn't justify.

"All the polls show Kerry getting whipped badly by Bush among practicing Catholics, Protestants and Jews. Moreover, the latest edition of *Time* magazine reports that only 7 percent of likely voters think Kerry is a man of strong religious faith. Given all this, his choice of Mara Vanderslice as his religious point woman is confounding. Her resume is that of a person looking for a job working for Fidel Castro, not John Kerry. Just wait until Catholics and Protestants learn who this lady really is."

Immediately, reporters called William Donohue asking him to verify his claims. This was no problem as we always double check our sources and would never make a statement of this magnitude unless we had the evidence to back up our assertions. Interestingly, some in the media seemed genuinely disappointed that Donohue had all the goods on Vanderslice; some even refused to write a promised piece on her.

It was the June 18 article in the *Washington Times* by Julia Duin that detailed exactly how the Kerry camp reacted to the league's news release. Duin reported that Vanderslice was no longer permitted to talk to the press. The Kerry campaign, she learned, was now in a "panic mode" over Vanderslice's role. In another release to the media, Donohue remarked as follows:

"It is disingenuous of the Kerry campaign to blame me for simply disclosing who Mara Vanderslice is. But that's how Kerry spokeswoman Allison Dobson is spinning it: 'It is extremely unfortunate and regretful,' she says, 'that John Kerry's political opponents would attack a person of faith in this way.' They just don't get it. The Kerry campaign hires a 29 year-old ultra-leftist who consorts with anti-Catholic bigots and the Catholic League is supposed to take this lying down? And if Vanderslice is so innocent, why have they gagged her? How is a director of outreach supposed to function if he or she is being muzzled?

"The larger issue remains: the Kerry campaign is treating

religion the way a sick kid treats lousy-tasting medicine—as something that simply must be swallowed. Why is it that this Catholic senator has no problem with ‘gay speech’—he knows how to talk the talk with transgender types—but stutters every time he engages in ‘religion speech’? Are people of faith so distant from him as to be virtual pariahs?

“To top it off, Kerry is now taking advice from the discredited priest, Father Robert Drinan. Drinan, who says he is part of Kerry’s ‘kitchen Cabinet’ on religious matters, was forced in 1997 to retract an outrageous *New York Times* op-ed column he wrote the year before supporting President Clinton’s veto of a ban on partial-birth abortion. If this is the kind of Catholic Kerry is listening to, he’s in deep trouble.”

Internet blog sites were chock full of commentary over this controversy. There is no doubt that the issue of politics and religion is proving to be a big one in the presidential election.

The Catholic League welcomes religion outreach efforts by both Republicans and Democrats, choosing not to align itself with either party. What interests us are the life issues and policies governing religious liberty.

JEWISH NEWSPAPER RIPS CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The lead editorial in the June 25 edition of the *Forward*, a prominent Jewish weekly newspaper, accused Catholic bishops of being a threat to democracy. William Donohue then let loose with the following statement to the press:

“Never have I read a more anti-Catholic editorial in my life.

It is the height of arrogance and intolerance for a Jewish newspaper to lecture Catholic bishops on the propriety of denying Communion to pro-abortion Catholic politicians. At issue is not a matter of public policy; on the contrary, it is purely an internal matter. As such, it is none of the *Forward's* business what disciplinary measures the bishops decide.

"This is how the editorial begins: 'The threat by Catholic bishops to withhold communion from politicians who uphold abortion rights is an affront not just to democracy, but also to the best moral teachings of Catholicism.' This is the oldest canard in the arsenal of anti-Catholics—to accuse them of being a threat to democracy. Not only that, the editorial presumes to know what the best moral teachings of the Catholic Church are better than the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"And there's more—just read this astounding comment: 'Where democracy is affronted is at the point where a church—the nation's largest single church, as it happens—attempts to impose its views from above by threatening to withhold what its believers consider an essential religious rite. That's nothing more than bullying, trying to bludgeon believers into substituting obedience for conscience. It's unfair to believers and unfair to the system.' (My italics.) Talk aboutchutzpah!

"The editorial ends by saying the bishops have failed to abide by their own creed because they 'dishonored [the] doctrine of life' by not condemning 'free-market fundamentalists' and the like. Which makes me wonder: What is more egregious—the ignorance or the bigotry?

"If the bishops threatened sanctions against anti-Semites, the *Forward* would congratulate them. In any event, Catholics are owed an apology."

AMERICANS UNITED ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE BISHOPS

Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State recently sent a letter to the IRS asking the agency to investigate what he termed “electioneering” by the Diocese of Colorado Springs.

Referring to Bishop Michael Sheridan’s pastoral letter about politicians receiving Communion, Lynn accused him of using “code language that says ‘Re-elect Bush and vote Republican.’” Lynn also alleged that Bishop Sheridan’s actions were “part of a larger trend among some members of the Catholic hierarchy to influence Catholic voters in this election year”; he cited the bishops of New Jersey and Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis.

We told the media, “It is disingenuous of Lynn to accuse Bishop Sheridan of ‘religious blackmail to steer votes toward the GOP.’ Sheridan never mentions any candidate or political party in his letter. He makes his judgment based on moral issues, on which members of both political parties can come up short.”

We went on to quote what Sheridan actually wrote: “The Church never directs citizens to vote for any specific candidate. The Church does, however, have the right and the obligation to teach clearly and fully the objective truth about the dignity and rights of the human person.” Lynn conveniently omitted this part of the pastoral letter.

Lynn joins a growing group of those who cry “separation of church and state” when Catholic bishops venture to speak on public issues. It is hard to take these critics seriously

when, with very few exceptions, they wink at campaigning and even political endorsements of candidates by name in some Protestant churches.

Lynn's remark that Bishop Sheridan's actions are part of a "larger trend" among some in the Catholic hierarchy is an attempt to intimidate the bishops into silence. And he has shown he is not averse to using the power of the state—the IRS—to do so. So much for separation of church and state.

DURBIN'S SCORECARD GETS AN "F"

On June 2, Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois released a report, "Evaluating the Votes and Actions of Public Officials from a Catholic Perspective," which ranked the twenty-four U.S. Catholic senators based on their votes in three areas: domestic, international and pro-life. The issues were taken from a publication issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Faithful Citizenship."

Referring to bishops who have said they may deny Communion to pro-abortion politicians, Durbin said they "cross the line in terms of what most Catholic Americans find acceptable regarding the relationship between their church and their government."

We didn't see it that way, and that is why we released the following statement to the media:

"To say that a senator votes better on Catholic issues because he has voted to increase the minimum wage while voting against a ban on killing a baby who is 80 percent born is ludicrous.

Senator Durbin has done the same as some House Democrats last month, lumping together policy issues that do not have the same moral weight. The Vatican's recent document on Catholic politicians, echoing the pope, states that Catholic lawmakers have '*a grave and clear obligation to oppose* any law that attacks human life' [emphasis in original]. The U.S. bishops, in the very same document used by Durbin to form the scorecard, call this 'the fundamental moral measure of their [lawmakers'] service.' Saying otherwise is a disgraceful misrepresentation of Catholic teaching.

"Durbin has even gone so far as to say that the 'right to religious belief and the separation between church and state' may be 'compromised' by bishops who impose sanctions on pro-abortion lawmakers. This is ironic, coming from the senator who on the Judiciary Committee enforced a de facto religious test barring pro-life Catholics from the federal bench. The fact of the matter is that the bishops have not only the right but the duty to speak on moral issues that play out in the public sphere; and Durbin's inflammatory rhetoric is a blatant attempt to muzzle them."

CATHOLIC DEMOCRATS REBUKE BISHOPS

In late May, forty-eight Democratic congressmen signed a letter to Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., taking issue with those bishops who have said that Catholic lawmakers should be denied Communion if they champion abortion rights.

The Democratic congressmen who signed the letter, almost all of whom are pro-abortion, admonished the nation's bishops not to "revive latent anti-Catholic prejudice" by threatening to deny them Communion.

We told the press that this is a classic example of "blaming the victim."

Bishops who call upon Catholic legislators to protect the rights of the unborn lest they jeopardize their Catholic standing are simply exercising their episcopal authority. To suggest that in doing so these bishops are promoting anti-Catholic bigotry is to exculpate the guilty and blame the innocent. If the issue were segregation, would these Catholic Democrats rebuke those bishops who endorsed sanctions against pro-segregation lawmakers? Would they be counseling the bishops to shut up lest they spark Catholic bashing?

The letter also questioned why the bishops have not sought sanctions against Catholic politicians who voted for the war in Iraq or who are in favor of the death penalty. To which we told the media: "In doing so, these lawmakers evince a profound ignorance: the pope's position on the war was that it could be resorted to only 'as the very last option,' thus allowing room for a legitimate debate on whether that time had arrived. Regarding the death penalty, the Holy Father has never taken an absolutist position against it; he argues that for the most part it is no longer necessary to defend society. In short, war and capital punishment, while never desirable, may sometimes be necessary. By contrast, abortion is *intrinsically evil*."

Both the bishops and the Catholic lawmakers have a free speech right to say what they want. But if the latter seeks to cry "separation of church and state" against the former, then it must be equally wrong for Catholic agents of the state to tell the bishops what to do.

“SAVED!” TRIES TO SMEAR CHRISTIANS

The MGM movie “Saved!” opened at select theaters on May 28. It was billed as a “sweetly subversive comedy” about an evangelical Christian high school. More accurately, it was an attempt to smear Christians.

The film features a Christian teenager who gets pregnant while attempting to reorient her homosexual friend; this follows a vision she has of Jesus, who appealed to her to “do everything you can to help him.” The girl’s mother has an affair with Pastor Skip, the school’s principal, and many experience a crisis of faith.

Louis Giovino, the league’s director of communications, saw the movie on May 21. Catholic League president William Donohue wrote the following news release based on Giovino’s report:

“Peter Adeo, president of worldwide marketing at MGM, has said, ‘I love the movie, but it is so hard to figure out who the audience is.’ He is correct. What he failed to say is this is why it will bomb.

“Not every movie with a religious theme has to be of the serious nature that ‘The Passion of the Christ’ is in order to succeed. ‘Sister Act,’ for example, succeeded as light comedy because it made people laugh without ever evincing an agenda. Not only is ‘Saved!’ not funny, the statement it makes about Christianity is strained and mildly offensive. To be specific, all the Christians are presented as good-natured but hopelessly narrow-minded persons who can’t negotiate life. On the other hand, the non-Christians are portrayed as tolerant and wise. And crude: the lone Jew remarks of Jesus on the

cross, 'Now that is what I call hung on a cross!' She also comments that instead of seeking to be 'born again,' she has decided 'not to serve Jesus after all, but to serve Satan.'

"MGM publicists have said the film was not made to offend Christians. But if this is true we would expect it to do very well in the Bible Belt. Not only will it not open there, if it bombs in places like New York and Los Angeles (not exactly religion-friendly environs), it'll never see the light of day elsewhere. Our guess is that the South will be 'Saved' from having to endure this flick."

On June 12, William Donohue debated the movie on the "Today Show" with the film's writer and director, Brian Dannelly. In the course of the debate, Donohue explained what was so offensive about the way the movie ended:

"What I'm a little bit tired of is the same kind of cruel caricature. And I love the way the movie ends. You know, here we have this idea that moral absolutes are bad. We need gray areas. Oh, really? Let me tell you something, Brian, you made this movie. Millions of people have lost their lives in the last century because of selling the idea that there are no moral absolutes. If there are no moral absolutes, we are back to different strokes for different people. We put pizzas into ovens in this country, they put Jews into ovens in Nazi Germany. Yet, that may not have been your intention, sir, but you're selling an idea which is toxic."

Dannelly did so poorly that he never showed up for a radio debate he had previously agreed to do latter that same day with Louis Giovino.