

MOVIE RATINGS FLAP ENDS; RELIGIOUS FILMS UNAFFECTED

A potential showdown between the Catholic League and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was avoided when a highly controversial issue that we addressed was quickly resolved. Our effort was clearly worthwhile given the happy ending.

The problem began on June 7, when Kris Fuhr, vice president for marketing at Provident Films (owned by Sony) , was quoted by Scripps Howard News Service. Fuhr said that someone at the MPAA told her that "Facing the Giants" was awarded a PG rating because the film "was heavily laden with messages from one religion and that this might offend people from other religions." The movie, which opens September 29, includes answered prayers, a miracle and references to Jesus.

We immediately confirmed Fuhr's account with her and then contacted the MPAA. Not satisfied with what we heard, we decided to press the issue. On June 13, Bill Donohue wrote Dan Glickman, chairman and CEO of the MPAA, requesting that he investigate why an "overtly" Christian film like "Facing the Giants" merited the PG red flag; in a news release on the subject, we asked our members to e-mail Glickman about their concerns.

On the evening of June 16, we received a call from Joan Graves, chairman of the MPAA ratings board. As it turns out, she was the MPAA official who spoke to Fuhr, but she had a different impression of their conversation. According to Graves, she told Fuhr that the PG rating was given because of mature issues, e.g., depression, matters relating to pregnancy and sports-related violence—not for being overtly religious.

Graves sent us a statement indicating their "long-standing

policy not to comment to the press about individual films other than to give the rating and the rating reasons," but owing to the "misunderstanding that this film received a PG rating for its 'religious viewpoint,'" she felt obliged to respond. She added, "This film has a mature discussion about pregnancy, for example, as well as other elements that parents might want to be aware of. There are many religious films that have been submitted for rating, and they have garnered ratings from G to R, depending on the graphics and intensity of various elements in the film."

We are satisfied with this response and are delighted to know that the MPAA has no policy of giving a PG rating to movies dubbed "too religious."

MADONNA STRIKES AGAIN

Pop-singer Madonna kicked off her "Confessions" tour in Los Angeles by offending Christians and drawing more attention to herself. Between her political statements and oral sex jokes, Madonna found the time to don a crown of thorns, hang from a mirrored cross and croon her ballad "Live to Tell" in front of a screen flashing images from the Third World.

When the Material Girl first embraced Kabbalah, we thought her new-found faith would inspire her to show some respect for religion. It stands to reason that a woman whose faith is so important to her that she drags her rabbi to her concerts would not want to mock the faith of others.

However, Madonna proved, once again, that you really can't teach an old pop star new tricks. She's been spicing up her act with misappropriated Christian imagery for a long time now. Perhaps she can't arouse any interest in her work without

it. Poor Madonna keeps trying to shock. But all she succeeds in doing is coming across as a boring bigot.

In our statement to the media, we said, “Do us all a favor, Madge, and stick to singing and dancing. Knock off the Christ-bashing. It’s just pathetic.”

When Bill Donohue appeared on Paula Zahn’s CNN-TV show, he said, “If she tried it with some other religion, she may lose more than her shirt.” He added, “She certainly won’t bother the Muslims, and I think we all know why that is.”

RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

The editorial of June 16 taking the Catholic League to task for its *New York Times* op-ed page ad (“Spin without end in abuse scandal”) is simply wrong on the facts.

On p. 29 of the 2005 annual *Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, it says that 81 percent of the victims were male and that 14 percent were younger than age 10 when the abuse began. On p. 43 of the John Jay *Supplementary Data Analysis* that accompanies the audit, it defines pedophile priests as those who began their abuse when their victims were 10 or less. Now if *NCR* wants to conclude from this data that homosexual priests do not account for most of the abuse, then it needs to explain itself.

Similarly, the Catholic News Service coverage of the John Jay report that studied the years 1950-2002 said that “An overwhelming majority of the victims, 81 percent, were males,”

and that “A majority of the victims were post-pubescent adolescents with a small percentage of the priests accused of abusing children who had not reached puberty.”

Indeed, in the National Review Board’s 2004 report, it said that “we must call attention to the homosexual behavior that characterized the vast majority of the cases of abuse observed in recent years.” No wonder board member Dr. Paul McHugh, a former psychiatrist-in-chief at John Hopkins Hospital, said last year that “This behavior was homosexual predation on American Catholic youth, *yet it’s not being discussed.*” (My emphasis.)

We know why the homosexual connection is not being discussed—it’s politically incorrect to mention it. Even the most recent John Jay report tries to cover-up this reality: it mentions the word pedophile 14 times, ephebophile 12 times, but never once does it mention homosexual. It should be noted that the term ephebophilia, meaning sex with postpubescent adolescents, is rarely used by experts outside the Catholic Church, has no clinical standing and is never used to refer to heterosexual acts.

Our ad also says that “it is estimated that the rate of sexual abuse of public school students is more than 100 times the abuse by priests.” The editorial brands this as “more spin,” claiming that “Sexual abuse of students by teachers, coaches and school employees is an area worthy of investigation, but virtually no serious research on the topic has been carried out.”

Apparently, *NCR* is unaware of the report, “Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature,” that was published in 2004 by the U.S. Department of Education. The report, authored by Dr. Charol Shakeshaft of Hofstra University, provides valuable insight into the problem. It was her conclusion that nearly 10 percent of American students are the victims of sexual misconduct by public school employees

each year. And it was Dr. Shakeshaft who told Education Week that "the physical sexual abuse of students in schools is likely more than 100 times the abuse by priests."

New York magazine recently did a story, "On Rabbi's Knee," that was subtitled, "Do the Orthodox Jews have a Catholic-priest problem?" To which the answer came, "Rabbi-on-child molestation is a widespread problem in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, and one that has long been covered up...." (As the article makes plain, it seems that the rabbi molesters typically choose boys as their victims.) While this does not constitute hard data, it offers a glimpse of reality.

Finally, the editorial admits that while our ad correctly cites the figures of priestly sexual abuse found in the bishops' audit, "It frequently takes years for those abuse victims to come forward." Wrong again. On p. 13 of the John Jay supplementary report, it says that "reporting patterns have stabilized over the last decade" and that "the decrease in sexual abuse cases [cited in the report] is a true representation of the overall phenomenon." Looks like *NCR* has paid too much attention to Dr. Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea. In 2003, she said, "You will see some kind of a bubble [in the figures] in 2005, when the people who were abused in the 1990s come forward." As I said at the time, "It remains to be seen whether her bubble will burst in 2006 when 2005 turns out to be a bust."

For the record, I have spoken out on TV and on radio many times against those who have called for an outright ban of homosexuals from the priesthood. That's because I know too many good homosexual priests and know how unscientific and malicious it is to say that homosexuality causes molestation. What I've said repeatedly is that while most gay priests are not molesters, most of the molesters are gay.

One more thing: if molesting priests like to hit on boys because they lack access to girls, then why is it that since

girls became altar servers in 1994, the numbers haven't changed? By a margin of 81-19—the exact figure found in the report covering the years 1950-2002—the molesters still prefer the boys.

JUDICIAL JUJITSU: HOW THE COURTS TREAT RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

By William A. Donohue

Every now and then, I read a book I wish I had written. Such a book is Patrick M. Garry's *Wrestling with God: The Courts' Tortuous Treatment of Religion*. For those interested in how the courts have twisted the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty into an unseemly mess, this is the book to buy. Garry offers a masterful account of the attenuation of religious liberty by a series of inconsistent and poorly reasoned decisions.

We have come a long way from the time when religious liberty was robustly celebrated by the framers of the Constitution to the point where singing "Silent Night" at a public school Holiday or Winter concert (formerly known as the Christmas concert) is likely to trigger a lawsuit. What this has to do with the First Amendment is something only those bent on rewriting history are prepared to argue.

Leonard Levy is one of the nation's leading students of the First Amendment. It is his view that the First Amendment does not offer much latitude to the public expression of religion. But as Garry points out, even a strict separationist like Levy

never thought that the expression “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance would ever be challenged in the courts. Levy made that prediction in 1994, only a decade before the Supreme Court considered such a case.

The First Amendment begins, “Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Regarding the “establishment” provision, we know from the author of this amendment, James Madison, that those words were penned to prohibit the Congress from establishing a national church and to prohibit the federal government from showing favoritism of one religion over another; what the states decided was to be their business. As for the reference to “free exercise,” it was meant to insulate religion from the reach of the state. As we now know, this is hardly the way most judges view the First Amendment today.

Under the current view, Garry instructs, “the exercise and establishment clauses [are] seen as being ‘at war with each other,’ with the exercise clause conferring benefits on religion and the establishment clause imposing burdens.” He wryly notes that “It was as if the framers had intended the two clauses to cancel each other out, producing a kind of zero-sum result with regard to religion.” He adds that “such an approach makes no textual sense, because the exercise clause is essentially being nullified by the establishment clause.” In other words, such reasoning has resulted in a form of judicial jujitsu.

Garry is correct to say that “there is no constitutional basis for interpreting the establishment clause as contradictory to the exercise clause,” and that is why he sees them forming “a single, unified religion clause that seeks exclusively to protect religious liberty.” He aptly quotes Michael Paulson to the effect that the establishment clause “prohibits the use of the coercive power of the state to prescribe religious exercise, while the exercise clause prohibits the use of

government compulsion to proscribe religious exercise.”

No matter, today’s rendering of the First Amendment pays no attention to what the framers wanted. Instead, much attention is given to the alleged “wall” that separates church and state. But prior to the *Everson* decision in 1947, there was no talk about this proverbial wall. Such talk became commonplace only after Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black (a former Ku Klux Klan member who hated Catholicism) lifted the metaphor from a letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 and inserted it into his 1947 decision. For the record, Jefferson penned his famous “wall” statement to convey his belief that the relationship between the federal government and religion should remain distant: the states, he reasoned, were best suited to deal with matters religious, and that is why as a Virginia legislator and governor he thought it proper for his state to endorse days of fasting and thanksgiving.

Once Black prevailed in his “wall of separation” opinion, it led the courts to become increasingly hostile to religious liberty. This hostility was given a new shot in the arm in the high court’s 1971 *Lemon v. Kurtzman* ruling. This decision held that for a statute to pass constitutional muster, it must have a secular purpose, must not advance or inhibit religion and must not foster “excessive government entanglement with religion.” Easier said than done.

In the wake of raising the bar so high, towns were told they could not have a nativity scene displayed on public property without displaying baby Jesus with a reindeer. Similarly, the parents of children who had been receiving remedial education from public school teachers in a parochial school—for two decades without a single complaint—were suddenly informed that this practice violated the U.S. Constitution. Even candy canes with religious messages had to be confiscated lest some high priest of tolerance objects.

To make matters worse, not only have the courts chopped the

religious liberty clause in two—assigning a subordinate position to the free exercise provision—they have assigned a subordinate position to religious speech vis-à-vis secular speech. For example, the courts typically grant constitutional protection to obscene speech—including obscenities that target religion—but they quickly become censorial when it comes to religious speech. So absurd has this condition become that the student who spews vulgarities at a high school commencement address has a much better chance of proceeding with impunity than the student who invokes the name of Jesus. Indeed, a student who curses Jesus has a better chance of escaping the wrath of school officials than the student who quotes Jesus.

“Textually,” Garry writes, “the Constitution provides greater protection for religious practices than for any secular-belief-related activities.” In fact, he contends, not only is religious speech afforded protection via the free exercise provision, it receives further immunity via the free speech clause of the First Amendment. It is precisely because Garry is so right about this that it is positively maddening to read court decisions that allow the establishment provision to trump religious speech. Such revisionism has created more than a legal nightmare—its tentacles have been felt in the nucleus of our culture: the public expression of religion has atrophied under the weight of judicial activism.

The way it works now, in order to get the courts to regulate secular speech, a direct cause and effect must be shown. For instance, the courts must be persuaded that if a particularly inflammatory exercise of speech occurs, then a particularly dangerous condition is almost certain to follow. Notwithstanding this caveat, the courts have allowed Nazis to march in a Jewish suburb, thus demonstrating the near absolute status it grants secular speech. But when it comes to religious speech—such as a nativity scene erected in the public square—all it takes for the courts to get involved is the outcry of someone who claims to be offended. This explains

why many defense attorneys now argue that the religious expression they are defending is not a matter of free exercise, it is a matter of free speech.

There is something absurd going on when a crucifix drowned in a jar of urine can be hung from a Christmas tree in the rotunda of a state capitol building, but a crucifix that is reverentially displayed can be prohibited (this hasn't happened yet, but it will). What this represents is nothing short of a bastardization of the intent of the framers: just as the left likes to play fast and loose with Scripture, the left likes to play fast and loose with the Constitution. Fidelity to the original text means nothing to ideologues bent on winning at all costs.

There are some legal scholars who find solace in recent court decisions that seek to skirt the Lemon rule by promoting a principle of neutrality: the government, so goes the argument, should remain neutral in cases involving religious expression. But Garry is not among them. Although he welcomes neutrality as a change from the hostility towards religion found in Lemon, he makes it clear that the framers never intended to "place religion and nonreligion on the same level."

The evidence that Garry marshals to support his argument about the intent of the framers is irrefutable. Despite attempts by secular supremacists to impose a rigidly secular vision of the common good on the rest of us, and their enfeebled attempts to distort history, nothing can change the words of the framers. They understood the critical connection between religion and freedom and it was their expressed view that self-government could not take root in a society without a strong religious—read Christian—foundation. From the beliefs, practices and public statements of the framers, to their insistence on ordered liberty, the men who launched our nation always gave due deference to the indispensable role that religion plays in society.

It is truly one of the great tragedies of our law schools that students are taught virtually nothing about the religious and moral underpinnings of our society. Indoctrinated in formalisms, they think that rules and procedures are the heart and soul of a free society. The founders would have regarded such a conception of liberty as impoverished, so totally myopic as to render it useless.

For freedom to prosper, civil liberties must be respected, but there is more to freedom than individual rights: a degree of civility and a sense of community must also prevail. Religious liberty helps to provide the latter, and without it all the rights in the world matter little in the end.

“The only way to preserve religious liberty and uphold the spirit of the First Amendment,” Garry informs, “is for the courts to articulate an enduring and consistent theory of the religion clauses.” To do this, however, requires an intellectual assault on the postmodernist game of rewriting history. Garry has made his contribution, and for that we can all be grateful.

MARYLAND GOVERNOR: FOE OF FREE SPEECH

On June 15, Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich fired Robert J. Smith, one of his Metro transit authority appointees, because Smith said that “Homosexual behavior, in my view, is deviant.” Smith, who stressed he is a Roman Catholic, said that his characterization reflected his beliefs and were made after hours on a cable TV show. Ehrlich branded his remarks “inappropriate, insensitive and unacceptable.”

Our response to the media was highly critical of Ehrlich:

“Ehrlich is a menace to free speech and a hypocrite, as well. In 2004, reporter David Nitkin and columnist Michael Olesker, both of the *Baltimore Sun*, incurred the wrath of Ehrlich when Nitkin was blamed for an incorrect map he had nothing to do with and Olesker was blamed for writing about someone’s expression at an event he didn’t attend. On a scale of one to ten, most would put these infractions closer to one than ten. But not Ehrlich—he ordered all state employees not to talk to either man ever again. This merited a *New York Times* editorial blasting the governor for ‘promulgating an extraordinary ban forbidding tens of thousands of state employees from talking to two *Baltimore Sun* journalists whose coverage displeased him.’ And the *Sun* sued Ehrlich.

“Yet when it comes to Maryland Democratic icon William Donald Schaefer, Ehrlich discovers the virtue of free speech. Schaefer, who is comptroller under Ehrlich (the governor is a Republican), went bonkers in 2004 when he had trouble ordering food at a McDonald’s: ‘I don’t want to adjust to another language. This is the United States. They should adjust to us.’ Ehrlich defended Schaefer at the time. And when, in the same year, Schaefer hammered AIDS patients, Ehrlich refused to criticize him.

“The First Amendment protects religious liberty and free speech, and Ehrlich respects neither. To top it off, he exhibits a double standard that smacks of elitism.”

The issue did not end there. On June 21, Bill Donohue was interviewed on a Baltimore radio program, “The Ron Smith Show” (WBAL). One of the callers was Maryland’s Secretary of Education Robert Flanagan. What began as a cordial disagreement quickly evolved into a heated exchange: after Donohue cited the *Catholic Catechism’s* teaching that homosexuality is “intrinsically disordered,” Flanagan denied this was true. It ended with Donohue blasting Flanagan for

being so ignorant about his own religion.

ABC NEWS REPORTS WOMEN “PRIESTS”

A report on the June 19 “World News Tonight” led viewers to think that eight women are about to be ordained as Catholic priests in the U.S.

The story covered the election of the first female presiding bishop in the Episcopal Church. Then came the following: “Most evangelical denominations and the Catholic Church steadfastly refuse to ordain women. However, that is changing. In late July, Joan Clark Hauk [sic], a grandmother from Pennsylvania, will be ordained as a Catholic priest, along with seven other women. It will be the first ceremony of its kind in this country, but one the Vatican will not condone.”

Bill Donohue immediately issued a news release and wrote a letter of protest to David Westin, president of ABC News. Below is an excerpt from our release:

“Some at ABC News are obviously hyperventilating over the election of the first female presiding bishop in the Episcopal Church, and that no doubt led them to package this story with a bogus account about women being ordained as Catholic priests. Joan Clark Houk, and seven other women, will hold an ‘ordination’ ceremony on a boat in Pittsburgh on July 31, but no one save mad feminists will give it any credence. Indeed, this happens every day in the asylum: some actually think they’re the pope.

“ABC News also errs in thinking that this make-believe game

has never been played before. In 1981, AP picked up on a story by the National Catholic Reporter which said a woman 'has been ordained and has been performing the duties of a priest for the past year.' In 1996, Catholic World Report ran a story on a meeting of the Women's Ordination Conference (which supports next month's game) wherein four women dressed as Catholic bishops and then 'solemnly blessed the audience as they made their way to a stage that was filled with dancing women.' And just last month, Victoria Rue, wearing a white robe, appeared before a crowd in San Jose and declared, 'I am a Roman Catholic woman priest.'"

On June 21, Donohue received a letter from Greg Macek, associate director of news practices at ABC News. His letter, while respectful, was not satisfactory: he disputed our account, saying he didn't think the story was skewed. While Donohue was not persuaded by Macek's reasoning, he believes that if ABC News covers this story on July 31 when the "ordinations" take place, they won't make the same mistake.

HAWKING MISREPRESENTS POPE JOHN PAUL II

On June 15, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking said that Pope John Paul II once told scientists that "It's OK to study the universe and where it began. But we should not inquire into the beginning itself because that was the moment of creation and the work of God."

The news story said that Hawking did not say when the pope allegedly made this remark. That didn't stop us from tracking it down, and what we found doesn't speak well for Hawking.

Hawking, in his book *A Brief History of Time*, states on page 120 that at a 1981 Vatican conference on cosmology Pope John Paul II said that “it was all right to study the evolution of the universe after the Big Bang, but we should not inquire into the Big Bang itself because that was the moment of Creation and therefore the work of God.” Importantly, there are no quotation marks around those words and no citation is offered. Ergo, this is Hawking’s impression of what the pope said.

Here is what the pope actually said: “Every scientific hypothesis about the origin of the world, such as the one that says that there is a basic atom from which the whole of the physical universe is derived, leaves unanswered the problem concerning the beginning of the universe. By itself science cannot resolve such a question: it requires human knowledge which rises above the physical, the astrophysical, what we call the metaphysical; what is required above all is the knowledge which comes from the revelation of God.”

The pope then quoted Pope Pius XII as saying, “We would wait in vain for an answer from the natural sciences which declare, on the contrary, that they honestly find themselves faced with an insoluble enigma.”

In 1988, John Paul said that “Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.” We quoted this statement to the media, and then added that “Hawking, who claims—without any evidence—that space and time have no beginning and no end, would be wise to refrain from positing false absolutes and learn to realize when he’s out of his league. Most important, he should stop distorting the words of the pope.”

Hawking got away with his little stunt because he’s the darling of the media. They treat him as if he’s some sort of saintly scientist who can do no wrong. Indeed, the same media outlets that ran with Hawking’s erroneous account of what the

pope said at the conference failed to do a follow-up story after we exposed his botched rendering of the facts.

In any event, there is a monumental difference between saying that there are certain questions that science cannot answer—which is what the pope said—and authoritarian pronouncements warning scientists to back off. Hawking should get his facts straight and refrain from putting words into people's mouths.

SONY OKAYS “DA VINCI CODE” DISCLAIMERS

When “The Da Vinci Code” opened in India, the film opened with a disclaimer. So much for the argument that Sony couldn't accede to the Catholic League's request to put a disclaimer in the movie without jeopardizing its artistic integrity.

The movie's opening was delayed in India for one week due to negotiations between Sony Pictures and the nation's censorship board. At issue was the propriety of inserting a disclaimer. Sony finally agreed to put the following statement before and after the movie: “The characters and incidents portrayed and the names herein are fictitious, and any similarity to the name, character or history of any person is entirely coincidental and unintentional.”

The week before caving into these demands, Sony agreed with Thailand's censorship board to put a disclaimer at the beginning and end of the film saying its content is fictional.

Bill Donohue was amused and issued the following news release:

“Some people will do anything for a buck. Having run up against a brick wall in India and Thailand, Sony caved and delivered on the disclaimer they said wasn’t necessary. It was either buckle to the demand or lose money, and Sony did what everyone knew they would do.

“I wrote to Ron Howard on March 18, 2005 asking for a disclaimer. I also wrote a *New York Times* op-ed page ad that was run on March 6 this year asking for a disclaimer. All I ever heard in response was that such requests would compromise the artistic integrity of those associated with the movie, and that it wasn’t needed because it was just a spy thriller. But neither argument holds water: many movies offer disclaimers and ‘The Da Vinci Code’ is anything but a thriller.

“How ironic it is that in the U.S. and Europe, which are predominantly Christian, no disclaimer is afforded, but in nations that are three percent (India) and one percent (Thailand) Christian, a disclaimer is given. It shouldn’t take the presence of a censorship board to persuade Sony to do the right thing—ethics alone should dictate.”

SMITHSONIAN LINKED TO ANTI-CATHOLICISM

The June edition of Smithsonian, the magazine published by the Smithsonian Institution, featured a lengthy article by James Carroll, notorious for his venomous attacks on the Church. Bill Donohue wasted no time in addressing the matter of an anti-Catholic article running in a government publication. Below is the text of the letter he sent to the members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the Board of

Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Smithsonian magazine and the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

A slightly amended version of this letter will be published in the magazine.

May 31, 2006

Dear Sir or Madam:

One week before the June edition of the Smithsonian reached the newsstands, and was made available online, I was contacted by scholars who subscribe to the magazine about an incredibly inaccurate, and ultimately unfair, piece by James Carroll titled, "Who Was Mary Magdalene?"

I have now read the article and concur with those who brought it to my attention: Carroll's work is an ideologically driven attack on Catholicism written by a journalist who has a long history of bearing his animus in public. It is the type of article one might expect in a journal of opinion with a decidedly left-of-center orientation—not in a serious publication that is so closely associated with the federal government.

Five years ago, Carroll published Constantine's Sword. Despite its subtitle, The Church and the Jews, the book had little to do with the Catholic Church's alleged passivity to the Holocaust. How else to explain why a book on the Holocaust would end with a plea for the Vatican to radically change its teachings on women and sexuality?

Similarly, Carroll's piece in the Smithsonian has little to do with its alleged subject matter, namely Mary Magdalene. In this instance, he concludes that "what most drove the anti-sexual sexualizing of Mary Magdalene [by the Church] was the male need to dominate women."

Make no mistake about it: James Carroll is not a disinterested writer—he is a man with an agenda. His goal is to discredit the contemporary Catholic Church by seeking to impair its historical record: after all, any institution that is anti-Semitic and anti-woman is inherently flawed. That he has succeeded in hijacking the good name of the Smithsonian to accomplish his objective is deeply troubling.

“The whole history of western civilization,” writes Carroll, “is epitomized in the cult of Mary Magdalene.” This claim, which is the first sentence in the article, is so extraordinary that no credible historian would ever choose to be identified with it. The next sentence is equally preposterous: “For many centuries the most obsessively revered of saints, this woman became the embodiment of Christian devotion...” It would be equally difficult to find any theologian who would raise Mary Magdalene to such an exalted status. So mixed up is Carroll that he even says Christians “worship” the Blessed Virgin. An error this profound is all the more startling coming as it does from a man who was once ordained a Catholic priest (it also doesn’t speak too well of the magazine’s editors).

In Carroll’s fevered imagination, Mary Magdalene has been promoted to rival—if not trump—the role of Peter. To get to where he wants to go—which is to paint the Catholic Church as anti-woman—he relies on Gnostic texts, treating them as if they carried the same historical weight as the New Testament. In particular, he seeks legitimacy in two books: Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor by Susan Haskins and Karen L. King’s The Gospel of Mary Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle.

The volume by Haskins was quickly dismissed by Commonweal, a *magazine not shy about challenging the teachings of the Catholic Church*: “Marred with trivial errors of fact, reliance on tendentious sources as well as citations almost always culled from secondary sources (and, thus, mostly unusable),

the author trumpets her own prejudices with wearying regularity." This kind of review is considered terminal, but it clearly had no effect on Carroll.

Ken Woodward, Newsweek's senior religion editor for decades, sheds perspective on what's going on when he says that "Mary Magdalene has become a project for a certain kind of ideologically committed feminist scholarship." He was referring to authors like Karen King who are bent on reconstructing history to suit their politics. For example, writers like King would have us believe that Pope Gregory in 591 intentionally sought to discredit Mary Magdalene because he was a sexist: "Blaming a pope fits the feminist agenda here," Woodward observes, "injecting an anti-hierarchical, indeed, anti-papal note. In short, patriarchy is again the culprit."

In Karen King's world, there is no such thing as truth—there are only truths. "All religions have within them plural possibilities," she told the Harvard Gazette, "which means we are always selecting materials to apply to situations in which we find ourselves, and so people are responsible for what they appropriate and how they interpret tradition." The plurality of belief is equally seductive to Carroll: He goes so far as to say we need a "new Christology," one which will allow the Catholic Church "to embrace a pluralism of belief and worship, of religion and no religion, that honors God by defining God as beyond every human effort to express God."

Such a position holds endless possibilities. It also allows Carroll to fantasize about the ever-sexual Mary Magdalene. He is most impressed with the "clear erotic overtones" of Mary Magdalene's loosened hair, and sees "erotic energy" in biblical descriptions of women. So enthralled with sexuality is Carroll that he even questions whether a line from the play "Jesus Christ Superstar"—which has Mary Magdalene wondering aloud about her love for Jesus—is reflective of "eros or agape." Indeed, he wants to know whether this signals "sensual

or spiritual” love.

Were it not for the source of Carroll’s commentary, all of this could be written off as interesting discourse, or the mere chatter of cynics. But the Smithsonian is not just another magazine: it is the flagship publication of the highly revered Smithsonian Institution, and thus carries the implicit imprimatur of the federal government.

For the Smithsonian Institution to be associated with an article about Roman Catholicism that is written by a man who questions the Resurrection, the need for salvation and the divinity of Christ is reprehensible. It is obvious that anyone who would deny the heart and soul of Judaism or Islam would not find a receptive audience at the Smithsonian. What needs to be explained is why the same level of editorial scrutiny broke down in this instance.

I look forward to hearing from you about this matter.

APOLOGY GRANTED

In the last issue of *Catalyst*, we mentioned that Bill Donohue had written a letter to Dr. John M. Lilley, president of Baylor University, wanting to know what Lilley found so funny about a male student who dressed up as a pregnant nun; a photo of the “nun” appeared on the front page of *The Lariat*, the campus newspaper.

Lilley wrote to Donohue on May 22 saying, “In a recent letter to the Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond of the Catholic Church of Central Texas, I offered my apology for the incident assuring him that, ‘the individual pictured in no way represents Baylor University.’ I offer the same apology and

assurance to you and the Catholic League.”