

FARRAKHAN MALIGNS CATHOLICISM

On the April 13th edition of *Meet the Press*, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan made several disparaging comments about Catholics and the Catholic Church; he also defended his bigoted remarks about Jews.

Farrakhan did not dispute a comment that he previously made stating that Catholicism has been a white religion designed to oppress blacks. He also did not disagree with a remark made by one of his minions that the pope is a “cracker.” He even blamed the Catholic Church for slavery. When asked if his comments were anti-Catholic, Farrakhan retorted that the “Catholic Church should not fasten on our words [it should] fasten on our deeds.”

Farrakhan then cited recent criminal acts committed by white Catholic men in Philadelphia, Bridgeport and Chicago as examples of Catholic behavior. He questioned how the Church could be “the bastion of love” when “all of this hate is coming towards us out of the Church.” He also charged that Pope Pius XII “looked the other way” during the Holocaust.

Farrakhan’s explosion occurred just days after he learned that Cardinal Bevilacqua refused to meet with him in Philadelphia. Farrakhan had sought a meeting with the Archbishop of Philadelphia, as well as with local Jewish leaders, and was turned down—for reasons evident to everyone but Farrakhan.

There was one interesting aspect to Farrakhan’s Philadelphia visit that did not get much attention: it was at the invitation of the mayor’s office that Farrakhan held a rally at Tindley Temple Methodist Church, a breach of separation of church and state that somehow got by the watchful eye of the press.

Following Farrakhan’s *Meet the Press* appearance, the league

issued the following news release:

"It is no secret that Farrakhan is anti-Catholic, as well as anti-Jewish. On *Meet the Press*, he was given an opportunity to retract his bigoted remarks, but he chose not to do so. Indeed, he made several new anti-Catholic statements, the most of absurd of which was to blame all Catholics for the conduct of a few Catholic thugs.

"Farrakhan is a minister of hate and that is why it is good news to learn that Catholic and Jewish leaders are refusing to meet with him in Philadelphia this week. They should no more dialogue with Farrakhan than with the Imperial Wizards of the Ku Klux Klan."

BETHANY COLLEGE HOSTS ANTI-CATHOLIC PLAY

Bethany College, a Disciples of Christ institution located near Wheeling, West Virginia, recently hosted *Agnes of God*, a notoriously anti-Catholic play turned movie. The play was performed May 7 to May 10 on the Bethany campus. It was the senior project of a female student in the department of fine arts. Faculty members supervised the project and the completed work will be filed in the college library archives.

The Catholic League expressed its outrage to the president of the university and to the media in the Wheeling area. Here is the text of those remarks:

"It is always distressing to learn about anti-Catholicism on our nation's campuses. But it is particularly disturbing to learn that a Christian college would actually sponsor bigotry

against the Catholic Church. *Agnes of God*, which was released as a movie in 1985, has been branded as anti-Catholic by Hollywood critic Michael Medved. Movie critic Roger Ebert told his audience that the psychiatrist in the movie, played by Jane Fonda, 'has a personal hatred of the Catholic Church.'

"The student who chose this movie, and the faculty who found it acceptable, obviously could have selected a script that was not offensive to Catholics. But, instead, they chose to do a play about a nun who murders her baby in the convent and flushes it down the toilet. This is a sad commentary on their thinking and it is an embarrassing statement about the Christian status of this Christian college."

MORE THAN JUST A PET PEEVE

by William A. Donohue

It is more than just a pet peeve of mine to encounter gratuitous slams against Catholicism. To be sure, what I'm going to describe is hardly the worst of what crosses my desk, but it is the kind of stuff that gets my goat.

The recent movie, *The Saint*, has virtually nothing to do with Roman Catholicism. So why is it that the movie opens with introducing the audience to what columnist Don Feder has said is "the most vicious portrayal of a Catholic priest" that he has ever seen?

Why is it that in an Indiana newspaper the reporter found it necessary to identify a man caught in a sting as “a former priest”? With regard to the others who were arrested we learned only their name, residence and age. Why is it that in a Gannett news story on MTV host Jenny McCarthy she is cited as “the product of Catholic schools”? Was it because she was also identified as a former Playmate of the Year?

Why is it that in a Nebraska newspaper story on the nightclub antics of young people that the only persons who were identified by religion were Catholics?

Why is it that a California newspaper found it necessary to disclose that a person involved in a car crash had “a sticker of the Virgin Mary on the steering wheel”?

Why is it that in a New York newspaper we read that a pro-life legislator is a Roman Catholic when no one’s religion from the pro-abortion side is mentioned?

Why is it that in an Arizona newspaper the Roman Catholic status of a lawmaker is cited in an unflattering story about him?

Why is it that a major weekly magazine ran a piece on Catholic delinquents only to mention that the youths were “products of Catholic schools”?

I could go on and on but you get the point. It seems that there are those in the media who can’t wait to seize on the religious affiliation of Roman Catholics when they are up to no good. Two comments about this.

No other religion receives quite the same treatment and none of the good deeds that Catholics do (cops come quickly to mind) merit citation of their religious status. There is a reason for this and it is called prejudice.

The source of this prejudice has much to do with what social scientists call “leveling.” Those who harbor a prejudice against Catholicism want the rest of the world to know that there is much that Catholics do that is despicable. The funny

thing is that this is hardly news to Catholics, but it is also true that this is hardly the real point that is being conveyed.

What is being conveyed is the idea that the teachings of the Catholic Church are nothing but platitudes, having no real effect on behavior. But as every Catholic knows, sin is not a negative reflection on Catholicism—it is a negative reflection on the sinner. What the bigots want the public to believe, however, is that Catholicism is merely a system of ethics, and is therefore undeserving of the respect that it has traditionally been accorded by non-Catholics.

At bottom, then, these gratuitous references to the religious affiliation of certain Catholics has to do with toppling the status that the Church has achieved in society more than anything else. Such attempts at leveling are done to satisfy the convictions of writers and producers that the Catholic Church should have no moral standing that is above that of any other religion or secular school of thought.

That is why these gratuitous remarks need to be challenged. Looked at in isolation, none of them demand much attention. But a culture is the product of the cumulative thoughts and deeds of its people, and that is why we cannot take what is happening too lightly.

To do nothing is to allow circulation of the idea that Catholicism has nothing special to offer to society. Once this notion is accepted, it clears the way for those whose ideas are positively destructive to the social order.

We have lived through enough to know that those who seek to promote a culture that is antithetical to Catholic teachings leave nothing but heartache in their wake. That is reason enough to see these gratuitous comments as more than just a pet peeve.

APOLOGIES IN THE AGE OF SPIN CONTROL

by Mary Ann Glendon

The Catholic Church is preparing to celebrate the Jubilee year 2000 and I am proud to have input into this event. After recently attending a meeting in Rome of the Central Committee that is handling the affair, I came away with certain anxieties about one aspect of the Jubilee preparation. They concern what one might call "apologies in the age of spin control."

As you may have noticed, there has been a good deal of public repentance lately concerning things that representatives of the Church did in the past. This is pursuant to Pope John Paul II's call for a "broad act of contrition" as part of the Church's celebration of the Jubilee. In his 1994 encyclical on preparing for the Third Millennium, he says that, "it is appropriate, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, that the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel, and, instead of offering the world witness of a life inspired by values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting that were truly forms of counterwitness and scandal."

According to the monthly magazine *Inside the Vatican*, the Pope presented this plan for a public mea culpa to the Cardinals at a meeting held several months before the encyclical was issued. Supposedly, he told them that this apology should cover the mistakes and sins of the past thousand years, and in conjunction with, among other things, the Inquisition, the

wars of religion, and the slave trade. That magazine also reported (still on hearsay evidence) that "the majority of the College of Cardinals was opposed to that kind of public act of repentance," though few, apart from Cardinals Biffi and Ratzinger, were said "to have raised their voices in opposition."

Whether or not that rumor of discord was well-founded, the Pope did address possible criticisms of his plan in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* itself, pointing out that while the Church "is holy because of her incorporation into Christ, she is always in need of being purified." It would be hard to argue with that proposition—or with the Pope's observation that "Acknowledging the weakness of the past is an act of honesty and courage . . . which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges."

So why do I feel some lingering anxiety about the public repentance aspect of the Church's celebration of the Jubilee? My nervousness has nothing to do with what the Pope has said, and everything to do with the way in which the acts of contrition he calls for may be distorted by interpreters who are no friends of the Church; by spin doctors who have never seen any need to apologize for anti-Catholicism or for persecution of Christians; in short, by persons for whom no apology will ever be enough until we Catholics apologize for our very existence.

My anxiety level escalates when I think of these apologies for past sins in light of Gertrude Himmelfarb's chilling account of the current state of historical scholarship. History is always an amalgam of fact and myth. But in recent years, historians have increasingly turned from the search for fact, to free-wheeling imaginative reconstructions of events. All too many have become spin doctors of the past, in the service of various agendas. As an elderly Boston lawyer recently remarked to me, "It's tough times for the dead."

Related to this concern about manipulation of apologies by the Church's detractors, is the likelihood of misunderstandings among the faithful. When the popular image of the Church in history owes so much to the likes of Monty Python and Mel Brooks, not to mention more scholarly myth manufacturers, its only to be expected that some Catholics will begin to believe that their Church holds a special niche in some historical hall of shame.

Misunderstandings are also apt to arise from the fact that most people hear of official expressions of regret as filtered through the press, rather than from primary sources. Thus, though the Pope is always careful to speak of sin and error on the part of *representatives* of the Church, rather than the Church itself, that all-important distinction is often lost in the transmission. Why be surprised, then, if the faithful begin to wonder: "If the Church was wrong about so many things in the past, maybe she's wrong about what she's teaching now."

All these concerns do not lead me to think that the Church should adopt Henry Ford's policy of "Never complain, never explain." What they do suggest to my mind, however, is the need for us laypeople to be alert for, and to counter as best we can, the misunderstandings that may arise as this aspect of the Jubilee preparation goes forward. To put it another way, we need to make clear that when we Catholics apologize for something, we are not taking responsibility for crimes Catholics didn't commit; we are not abasing ourselves before persons and groups whose records compare unfavorably with our own; and we are not in any way denigrating the role of the Catholic Church in history as an overwhelmingly positive force for peace and justice.

Which brings me back to the general problem of how we are to understand expressions of contrition in the age of spin control.

Of course the Holy Father is right to emphasize the importance

of confessing our sins, doing penance, and amending our lives. But I would like to suggest that we laypeople have a certain responsibility to help keep these penitential activities in proper perspective. Often it is the laity who will be in the best position to see when sincere apologies are being opportunistically exploited. Often it will be the laity who are in the best position to set the record straight.

Flannery O'Connor, it seems to me, showed us how to do this over forty years ago. When a friend wrote her to complain about the Church's shortcomings, O'Connor shot back, " [W]hat you actually seem to demand is that the Church put the kingdom of heaven on earth right here now." She continued:

Christ was crucified on earth and the Church is crucified by all of us, by her members most particularly, because she is a church of sinners. Christ never said that the Church would be operated in a sinless or intelligent way, but that it would not teach error. This does not mean that each and every priest won't teach error, but that the whole Church speaking through the Pope will not teach error in matters of faith. The Church is founded on Peter who denied Christ three times and couldn't walk on the water by himself. You are expecting his successors to walk on the water.

So, in the spirit of Blessed Flannery, I would suggest we bear in mind that an apology for the shortcomings of representatives of the Church is, first and foremost, an apology to God. "I am heartily sorry," as we say in the Act of Contrition, "because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all because I have offended thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love."

When we Catholics repent during this "new Advent" preceding the Jubilee, it is not because our sins are more shameful than those of others, but because we and our pilgrim Church are on a trajectory—we are climbing Jacob's ladder, striving to "put on the new man," trying to be better Christians today than we

were yesterday.

So far as the *public* face of the new Advent is concerned, I would suggest that the best way to show that we are moving forward on our trajectory is *not* by abasing ourselves in front of those who are only too eager to help the Church rend her garments and to pour more ashes on her head. Our best course is simply to demonstrate in concrete ways that the members of the mystical body of Christ are constantly growing in love and service to God and neighbor.

Finally, and most importantly—let us remember what these millennial apologies are not: they are not apologies for being Catholic! That we need never do. That we must never do.

Professor Glendon teaches at Harvard Law School and is a member of the Catholic League's Board of Advisors.

“ELLEN” DRAWS LEAGUE COMMENTARY

The following article, by William Donohue, ran in the New York Daily News on April 29.

Sweeps week is to Hollywood what the world series is to baseball. Well, not quite. While both events loom large, the world series features the very best in baseball, but sweeps week often features the very worst of Hollywood. For evidence, consider tomorrow night's episode of “Ellen.”

As everyone knows, the great ballyhooed “coming out” of Ellen is about to happen. Just in case this bores you, the Disney folks have decided to stack the deck with such stars as Oprah,

Demi Moore, k.d. lang, Melissa Etheridge and other cameo stunt women. They need to: "Ellen" is a lousy show that is falling flat on its face.

Does the public care? Notwithstanding the much publicized "coming out" parties that will dot the gay community, a recent *TV Guide* survey reports that 63% of those familiar with "Ellen" have said they will not watch the April 30 show. And we know that General Motors, Chrysler and Johnson and Johnson have withdrawn sponsorship of this episode. Now that's good news.

It's always good news to know that the public resents being manipulated, whether it is by the media, politicians or used-car salesmen. But it's also good news to learn that Americans are fed-up with having the gay agenda being forced down their throats.

Tomorrow night's "Ellen" has nothing to do with the legitimate issue of treating gays and lesbians as persons imbued with human dignity. No, what it has to do with is the selling of a lifestyle, a lifestyle justly deemed undesirable by most Americans. Those who contend that gay rights is analogous to black rights continue to miss the point: it is the purpose of the gay rights movement to challenge the sexual ethos of the Judeo-Christian tradition. All Martin Luther King ever wanted was societal acceptance of blacks as individuals; he never sought legitimation of a lifestyle.

Is it any wonder that just last night on "Married with Children," Marcy's lesbian twin sister came out of the closet? Or that Sunday's "Mad TV" did a gay parody of Mary and Rhoda's relationship on the "Mary Tyler Moore Show"? What's going on is a kind of in-your-face hostility targeted against those of us who still ascribe to the moral values that have long undergirded our society. And make no mistake about it—that means most of us.

Any society that expects to endure must defend its heritage as much as it defends its borders. To be sure, there are some societies that should not endure, but our society is not in that category and that is why we have an obligation to shield the traditional moral order from those who would subvert it. In this vein, the most American thing we can do is not watch "Ellen."

There is something else at work here, too. What's being done is being done not strictly for politics, but for money. Here's the proof.

In February, I met with many executives in Hollywood, and several of them said that they would never let their own children watch what they serve up each night on TV. They even boasted how their kids watch nothing but Nickelodeon in their house. So while we're being treated to "Ellen," these guys will be sitting around watching "I Love Lucy" with their families.

By the way, one of those executives who made this admission was Ted Harbert. He is also the one who developed "Ellen" for ABC.

HATRED AGAINST US RUNS DEEP

Catholic League members were asked in a recent appeal to help fund a direct mail campaign in search of new members. As usual, they were generous. The direct mail effort was based on a survey of anti-Catholicism and was sent to prospective new members. Like all such campaigns, some of those who were sent the survey were misidentified as Catholics. How we know this is evident from the hate mail we received.

Here is a small sample of the actual statements that were sent to the Catholic League from those who mistakenly received our direct mail survey. The next time someone asks whether you are right in believing that anti-Catholicism exists, just read to them some of these gems.

- "I have not been a Roman Catholic since 1965. People like you make me glad I switched."
- "I probably wasn't supposed to receive this survey. I am a Christian belonging to the Church of Christ faith. I think it is sad that Catholics feel the need to organize a League of their own."
- "You are dragging Catholics into the mud."
- "I have never heard of this Catholic bashing."
- "ALL CATHOLICS GO TO HELL. HA. HA."
- "The Catholic Church should be treated with utmost disrespect."
- "Catholicism should be scourged from the face of the earth."
- "Pope John Paul is the Anti-Christ."
- "I insist that you purge my name and address from your evil files. P.S. F___ You."
- "The laws of the church are man made and can be changed. The church and the pope do not have the right to tell a person to stay in a situation because the church says we have to."
- "How funny that my name ended up on your list to fight Catholic bashing! Must be someone's idea of a joke! I happen to love cartoons, cards, jokes and satires on the Church. It's far better for me to laugh AT the Church, rather than build up anger about it."
- "Just thinking about the Catholic Church makes me angry! So on your Survey, you can chalk me up to being anti-Catholic."
- "In my opinion, the Catholic Church deserves the criticism it gets—and in fact should get more."
- "I'm glad it [Hollywood] doesn't offer a respectful

picture of the Catholic Church.”

- “Christmas never should have been made!”

What is amazing about this is that all these people needed to do was throw the survey in the garbage. But that would be a sign of indifference, and that is the last sentiment these people feel about the Catholic Church.

“SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE” IS NO “SEINFELD”

For the past few months, the Catholic League has complained about certain segments of *Saturday Night Live*. The April 5 show offended Catholics again. To demonstrate that the league is not hypersensitive about all comedy that pokes some fun at Catholics, it is worth contrasting *Saturday Night Live* with *Seinfeld*.

The April 24 edition of *Seinfeld* showed Seinfeld trying to find a particular priest who could help him with some needed information. When he learned that the priest was hearing confession, Seinfeld went into the confessional box to consult with the priest. Nothing that was said was in any way derogatory of Catholics, but obviously some liberties were taken.

In the same show, blacks, Jews, dwarfs and dentists were all the butt of some humor. It is in this Mel Brooks-type context (fun being poked at nearly everyone) that judgments about crossing the line must be made. It is our take that this showing of *Seinfeld* did not cross the line.

However, the April 5 edition of *Saturday Night Live* was

offensive. During a satirical news broadcast, the news anchor discussed a piece of student artwork deemed inappropriate by school officials. The art was described as “a picture of a rat sucking the breast of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” What followed was a short disagreement about why the art was withdrawn.

This kind of humor is not in the same category as the comedy shown on *Seinfeld* and deserves to be criticized as such. We are bringing this to the attention of executives at NBC (it airs both shows) so that some good may come of our complaint.

LEAGUE SUPPORTS FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER PRINCIPLES

The Catholic League has endorsed the Common Ground Project of the First Amendment Center. The center, located on the campus of Vanderbilt University, is committed to “Religious Liberty, Public Education and the Future of American Democracy.”

By signing this statement, the league joins such diverse supporters as American Federation of Teachers, Anti-Defamation League, Christian Coalition and the Christian Legal Society. The following is a list of the six principles that the league endorsed.

I. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY FOR ALL Religious liberty is an inalienable right of every person.

II. THE MEANING OF CITIZENSHIP Citizenship in a diverse society means living with our deepest differences and committing ourselves to work for public policies that are in the best interest of all individuals, families, communities and nations.

III. PUBLIC SCHOOLS BELONG TO ALL CITIZENS Public schools must model the democratic process and constitutional principles in the development of policies and curricula.

IV. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect.

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOLS Parents are recognized as having the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children, including education.^a

VI. CONDUCT OF PUBLIC DISPUTES Civil debate, the cornerstone of a true democracy, is vital to the success of any effort to improve and reform America's public schools.

AMERICAN HEALTH NETWORK OFFENDS

Most people have a good image of American Health Network, the cable TV channel that offers advice on how to stay healthy. That is why we were struck by an offensive ad it recently published.

The ad shows a picture of the head of a nun in habit, "Sister Mary Elizabeth," with the inscription, "Don't do that you'll go blind." Below this it says, "Everybody thinks they're a doctor. Fortunately, on America's Health Network, everybody really is." The rest of the ad is similar.

The league expressed its objections to this ad and has asked

the network to reconsider its decision to publish it.

AN EXCHANGE WITH “FRONTLINE”

“Valentina’s Nightmare” is the story of a brave young African girl who barely survived a brutal massacre in Rwanda in 1994. Her family was among the 800,000 Tutsis who were killed in the genocide. The PBS program, “FRONTLINE,” aired this story in April. Unfortunately, it implicated the Catholic Church in a way that was unfair.

In a letter sent to PBS stations around the country, Jim Bracciale, director of communications for PBS, stated that “Human rights groups and survivors say that although [Catholic] clergy and religious workers were slain during the genocide, others condoned or even encouraged the murders.” He added that “In past pronouncements over the mass killings, Pope John Paul II defended the church, saying it ‘could not be responsible for the misdeeds of its members who have acted against evangelical law.’”

William Donohue wrote to Bracciale asking two questions regarding the first charge: “Precisely which human rights groups said—and with what evidence—that ‘others’ (meaning Catholic clergy) ‘condoned and even encouraged the murders’ in Rwanda? And who are these members of the clergy who allegedly said such things?”

Regarding the comment on the pope, Donohue said “Surely you know the pope does not defend mass killings. And surely you know that if someone on your staff commits misdeeds that it would be unfair for me to criticize you by charging that you are defending your office by not taking responsibility for the behavior of your subordinates.”

Bracciale called Donohue once he received his letter. Though the conversation was cordial, Donohue still didn't get an answer to his questions regarding the human rights groups and clergy who supposedly made charges against the Church. Regarding the comment by the pope, there was clearly a difference in interpretation.

Bracciale sent Donohue a copy of the video and a letter that further explained his position. "While you are correct that the Pope—and the Catholic Church—cannot be held responsible for the acts of individual members, the Pope's statement does not squarely rebuff those individuals. Instead, as the church's spiritual leader, he asks those involved in these crimes to reconcile with God and 'to bear the consequences of the deeds.'"

The letter closes with the statement, "I believe this is the central difference in our interpretation of the Pope's statement." Bracciale is partly right: the difference essentially comes down to how culpable the pope is for not condemning the killers. But anyone familiar with the Church, and with this pope, in particular, should know that condemning people for wrongdoing is not exactly the Catholic way.