

SECULARIZING HOLIDAYS

RELIGIOUS

The secularization of religious holidays has been on-going for some time now, but it is the position of the Catholic League that every opportunity to reverse this trend must be taken. That is why it recently appealed to those involved in the Christmas and Easter Seal campaigns to reconsider past practices.

In a letter to the head of the American Lung Association, the league expressed dismay at the organization's decision to refrain from using religious images in the annual Christmas Seal campaign. A similar letter was sent to the head of Easter Seals.

In short, we are asking that the original intent of the holidays be given due recognition by restoring religious images to the stamps.

UNCHRISTIAN-LIKE BEHAVIOR

The *Parent Educator* is a Christian Home Schooling publication from California. On the surface, at least, it is hospitable to Catholics and Protestants alike. How, then, to explain the editorial decision to publish a strikingly anti-Catholic letter in a recent edition of the publication?

The letter charges that "Romanism...is under God's curse" and that Catholicism is a "false gospel" that has led "millions away from the gates of heaven to the pit of hell."

The league sent a letter of protest and was told that the volume of complaints was so high that no more letters could be published. We were only too happy to hear that.

MEAN-SPIRITEDNESS OR BIGOTRY?

We've had our share of complaints with the *Hartford Courant* before so it wasn't surprising to learn that one of the paper's columnists launched a salvo at us. But we didn't expect it to occur on Easter Sunday.

On March 30, Barbara Roessner wrote a flip piece confessing her agnosticism. She also took the opportunity to deride Christianity, making silly comparisons along the way. William Donohue's response was published on April 26. It is printed below.

Dear Editor:

Barbara Roessner ("Making sense of heaven," March 30) takes advantage of Easter Sunday to express her agnosticism. Indeed, she cannot resist making a snide remark about Christ's resurrection being unbelievable.

I have just one question: if a columnist wrote a flip article on Yom Kippur stating how silly was the whole idea of a Day of Atonement, would not Ms. Roessner detect an element of bigotry, or at least of mean-spiritedness, in it?

CALIFORNIA BILL ON HOMOSEXUALS UNWARRANTED

The Catholic League typically avoids taking a position on homosexuality, but there is one bill that is presently being considered that is of interest to the league.

A bill is pending before the California legislature that purports to prohibit discrimination against homosexuals in the public schools. But upon closer scrutiny, the bill contains measures that would directly impact on academic freedom and indirectly impact on parochial schools. The central problem with the bill is that it reaches beyond the legitimate issue of non-discrimination and has the effect of sanctioning homosexual behavior.

Under the bill, teachers would be prohibited from giving instruction that might “adversely” reflect on homosexuals. While this sounds honorable, it may also stifle teachers from discussing rational objections about lifestyle choices. Textbooks that raise such questions are specifically held to be objectionable by this bill, thus conveying the message to students that society has no interest in promoting monogamous relationships within the institution of marriage. As such, one of the most basic institutions of Western Civilization would be viewed as nothing more than a lifestyle choice.

AB 101 would also affect interscholastic athletics between public schools and faith-based schools. Hence, Jewish and Christian schools that object to homosexuality would find themselves in the position of having to modify their doctrinal prerogatives as a condition of participating in some public school activities. This is something no Catholic school could accept.

The bill would be necessary if there were ample evidence that

intolerable practices against homosexuals would be rectified with the passage of this legislation. The bill would also be persuasive if there were reason to believe that no unfair burden would be placed on academic freedom. Moreover, the bill would be reasonable if it contained no language that impacted on the discretion of private schools to foster their own vision of sexuality. But in all three cases, the bill fails to satisfy.

Therefore, it is the position of the Catholic League that AB 101 is ill-advised and should be opposed.

PIUS XII DEFENDED

On April 16, the *Washington Post* ran a news story discussing the honors that the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum bestowed on those Catholics who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Unfortunately, the way the story began did not give tribute to these heroic Catholics.

Here is how the story began: “They were few, lamentably few. A half-century ago, while their neighbors drew the shades and closed their ears, these few could not ignore what was happening to the Jews. They could not ignore the moral message of their Catholic faith.” The article also raised questions regarding the role that Pius XII played at that time.

William Donohue sent the following letter to the newspaper and it printed it on April 26:

Caryle Murphy (new story, “Museum Honors WWII Catholics Who Aided Jews,” April 16) writes that there “were few, lamentably few” Catholics who helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust.

Pope Pius XII is also cited as a person who did little to help.

This is strange given the fact that it was Israeli diplomat and scholar Pinchas Lapide who said that “The Catholic Church under the pontificate of Pius XII was instrumental in saving the lives of as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands.”

It is axiomatic that every person and institution—including the Catholic Church—could have done more to rescue Jews and others from Hitler’s madness. But to state that there were “lamentably few” Catholics who did anything is contrary to the historical record.

PHILADELPHIA NEWSPAPERS TARGET ARCHDIOCESE

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Weekly* recently published articles that sought to put the local archdiocese on the defensive. Thanks to Cardinal Bevilacqua and the local chapter of the Catholic League, the newspapers did not prevail without a stern rejoinder from both sources.

On April 14, the *Inquirer* published a story alleging that the archdiocese misspent funds for a teleconferencing center. What was particularly galling about the article was the fact that the reporter had previously met with archdiocesan officials and was supplied accurate information. But that didn’t stop him from misrepresenting the story.

The article, “Archdiocese’s high-tech multimedia center gets little use,” alleged that the archdiocese got involved in a

half-million dollar boondoggle by spending money for a teleconferencing center that never materialized. What it didn't say was that the funds were earmarked to pay for the renovation of almost the entire 12th floor of the Archdiocesan Office Center. Indeed, the conference room that was built is regularly used by employees and is not the useless space that the article suggested it was.

Cardinal Bevilacqua defended the archdiocese when he wrote that "the newspaper has done a great disservice to all the faithful of this Archdiocese for the story invites the reader to a belief that the Catholic Archdiocese consciously prioritizes material values and cooperate life over spiritual values and service to the poor."

His Eminence is right. The effect of such an article is to convey the message that the Church is more concerned about material comfort than the spiritual needs of the faithful. This argument, which is a staple in the arsenal of anti-Catholic bigots, is especially unfair given the character of Cardinal Bevilacqua: those who know him know him as one of the most genuinely holy men of the Church.

Art Delaney, who represents the league in the Philadelphia area, called John Bull of the *Inquirer* to register a complaint. Delaney was supplied with important information by Brian Tierney and Jay Devine, two capable public relations executives who service the archdiocese; Tierney let his own thoughts on this matter known to the paper as well.

Though not as influential as the *Inquirer*, the editorial that appeared in the April 16 edition of the *Philadelphia Weekly* was even worse. Written by Tim Whitaker, the piece was nothing more than a tirade against Cardinal Bevilacqua. The trigger to the tirade was the decision by Cardinal Bevilacqua not to meet with Louis Farrakhan.

Attorney Michael Curry, an official of the Catholic League

chapter in Philadelphia, wrote a stinging letter to the newspaper refuting the charges one by one. Curry was particularly incensed over the charge that the archdiocese rebuffed Farrakhan out of pure self-interest and not out of concern for Farrakhan's anti-Semitic, as well as anti-Catholic, record.

Curry also said that Whitaker never bothered to comment on the strange church-state entanglement that was evident in the decision by the Mayor's office to invite Farrakhan to a rally at Tindley Temple Methodist Church. Another "oversight" that Curry pointed to was the silence in the face of Farrakhan's "bodyguards"; they searched attendees and forcibly separated the men from the women in the church.

"In the end," Curry wrote, "your own bigotry towards the Catholic Church was the only real message of your editorial." He closed by noting that "The only good thing that I can say is that, since your paper is given away, I didn't spend fifty cents to read your uninformed and unbalanced editorial."

IS GANNETT ANTI-CATHOLIC?

In the pages of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, an M.D. from California, Michael Franzblau, paid for two full page ads raising the question, "Why Does Gannet publish Anti-Catholic and Anti-Semitic Material?"

The ad shows a cartoon ridiculing Bishop Gumbleton and the Sacrament of Reconciliation (an ad that the league previously objected to) and a column scoring Dr. Franzblau as a "vindictive" man obsessed with punishing people believed to be Nazis (Franzblau is Jewish).

Gannett runs a huge chain of newspapers across the nation. The league, while not charging Gannett with being anti-Catholic, nonetheless supported the general thrust of Dr. Franzblau's concerns. In a letter to the CEO of Gannett, John Curley, the league appealed to Curley's "sense of fairness and goodwill" by urging him to discontinue the publication of any "anti-Catholic" or "anti-Semitic" material.

The response from Gannett was not defensive but it was not entirely satisfactory, either. Essentially, what Gannett said was that neither of the two items cited in the ad reflected "our corporate viewpoint." We hope not. We also hope that Gannett learned something from this exchange.

MIAMI HERALD RESPONDS TO LEAGUE APPEAL

In the May *Catalyst*, we mentioned that the league had asked David Lawrence, the publisher and editor of the *Miami Herald*, not to print any more anti-Catholic ads submitted by the Seventh Day Adventists. Mr. Lawrence replied that he had "some real doubts about that ad [the one that ran on March 22]" and had already expressed his concerns internally.

While acknowledging the importance of freedom of speech, Lawrence noted that lines must be drawn. "Were this ad to be submitted again," he wrote, "I would ask for changes to made."

The league is pleased with this response and hopes that in the event the ad is resubmitted, enough anti-Catholic statements will be deleted to convince those responsible for it to pack it in once and for all.

ANYONE FOR SCHOOL CHOICE?

If there was ever any doubt about the popularity of school choice, it was stricken when New York City launched a modest experiment of its own. At the behest of Mayor Giuliani, a foundation created by Wall Street executives helped raise funds to transfer 1,000 public-school students to parochial and other private schools.

The students would be selected by lottery from the among the city's worst public schools. Here are the results: there were more than 17,250 public-school children who applied for the 1,000 openings.

So what does this tell us? Among other things, it says that if the poor are given the same choices afforded the affluent, they will vote with their feet and walk their child to the nearest Catholic school.

MISSISSIPPI MUDSLINGING

Two complimentary articles about Catholicism that recently appeared in the *Picayune*, a Mississippi newspaper, was responsible for setting off a firestorm of anti-Catholicism stemming from local Baptists. One of the two articles gave good coverage to the work of Father John Noone and the other tried to unify local Christians. Both were met with strong rejection, first by Concerned Baptists from Pearl River & Hancock Counties, and second by Brother James McCraney of Sones Chapel Missionary Baptist Church.

The statement by Concerned Baptists, which appeared in the Picayune, was not anti-Catholic so much as it was a strong defense of the Baptist tradition. Included in the defense, not unexpectedly, were comments like "We reject papal authority" and "We reject the teaching of the actual presence of Christ's body and blood in communion (Holy Eucharist)."

Brother Craney, however, did not settle for repeating standard Protestant teachings. He took to the airwaves denouncing the Catholic Church.

For example, on April 20, Brother McCraney said on his radio program, "The Bible Truth Show," that Catholics should be wary of accepting any teachings from "a man who calls himself Father but dresses like mama." He called priests "liars from Hell" and "serpents in the pulpit" for consecrating the Eucharist; Transubstantiation was labeled an "ungodly" doctrine. Brother McCraney added that the Catholic Church was "the mother of harlots" and "the source of all untruth."

The league has asked Brother McCraney to cease and desist from fomenting division between Catholics and Baptists. We are awaiting his response.