

PRISONERS' RIGHTS IN TEXAS

A Catholic involved in prison ministry in Cuero, Texas, contacted us during Lent complaining that inmates at the TDCJ Stevenson Unit were denied requests for meatless meals on Fridays during the Lenten season.

The first thing we did was to verify the charge that Jews and Muslims had their dietary laws respected by the prison on their holy days. In fact, porkless diets are customarily provided upon request. We then wrote to the senior warden at the facility. When it became apparent that we were not going to get a response, we called. It seems that a new person has been appointed and she knew nothing of our request.

Why don't you write to Brenda Cheney, Senior Warden, Texas Department of Criminal Justice—Stevenson Unit, 1525 FM 766, Cuero, Texas 77954. Introduce her to the Catholic League and ask her to establish an equal playing field. And tell her you want a response in writing.

If this doesn't work, we'll ask you to contact a Texan with high political ambitions. We have a hunch he won't disappoint us.

COLLEGES TO AVOID

John Leo broke the story but we felt it was necessary to follow up. Here's the bottom line: don't send your kid to Tufts, Middlebury, Grinnell or Whitman.

All four colleges are now on record banning religious groups from denying leadership positions in student clubs to

practicing homosexuals. The radical gay agenda on college campuses is already out of control, but this kind of punitive methodology is new. The goal, of course, is to punish Christians, Jews and Muslims for holding religious beliefs that are inconsistent with the views of the high priests of political correctness. But they can only win if we let them.

If you are an alumnus of these schools, we suggest you write to the chairman of the board of trustees telling him why you're going to drop all future contributions. Don't bother writing to the presidents of these schools—they're the ones who sponsor this kind of tyranny.

“THE VIRGIN SUICIDES” EXPLOITS CATHOLICISM

In last month's *Catalyst*, we flagged a movie that promised to be offensive to Catholics, “The Virgin Suicides.” Tamara Collins, a research analyst at the Catholic League who monitors Hollywood, saw the movie when it opened in select theaters in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

It is a film about five Catholic teenage girls who are reared in a sexually repressive home; all of them eventually commit suicide. Written and directed by Sofia Coppola, the daughter of Francis Ford Coppola (who produced the movie), the film opens with an attempted suicide that shows the blood falling on a holy card of the Virgin Mary with rosary beads in the background.

Throughout the film, Catholic imagery and ritual are prevalent. The repressive parents make their girls virtual prisoners in their own home, making them destroy their rock

records after having heard a “spirited church sermon.” The movie opened nationwide in May.

Here is what our review of the movie said:

“The *New York Times* says ‘The Virgin Suicides’ speaks of boys in the movie who seek ‘to free the girls from the prison of their strict Catholic household.’ *Newsday* said ‘The putative villain may be Mom (Kathleen Turner), who runs her house like a convent.’ From the *San Jose Mercury News*, we learn of a ‘guilt-racked Catholic [mother] ready to lock her girls away like so many storybook Rapunzels.’ And so on.

“Our own take on the movie isn’t much different: a nexus is crafted, the purpose of which is to tie the teachings of the Church on sexuality to the girls’ suicides. Now if this film were about the real world—and not the stereotypical view of Catholicism as entertained in Hollywood—it would show a Catholic home where the girls lived rather ordinary lives and grew up to be mothers.

“A true story about sexuality and teenage suicide would show what happens to adolescents exposed to a ‘value-free’ Sixties-type home. It is not the kids who learn from the Dr. Lauras who wind up a psychological mess, it is the ones who were told by the Dr. Ruths to act on their own appetites who wind up that way. And oh, yes, the movie’s opening on Good Friday was not lost on the Catholic League.”

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

There is medicine for those who can’t separate fantasy from reality but there’s no cure when it’s self-induced. Consider two public persons, neither of whom is unaccustomed to making

publicly embarrassing statements: tennis champ Martina Navratilova and Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong.

Navratilova was recently interviewed by CNN about gay rights. "And one day," the lesbian said, "I do believe the pope and the church will be apologizing about their treatment of homosexuals over the millennia." Now as if to show who is dumber, CNN anchor Kyra Phillips then asked, "Well, he's beginning to apologize, isn't he?" To which Martina said, "Yes, he—they're figuring it out. It's just—it's a matter of time. We know we're right, and one day we'll be proven right. Hopefully it's not too far away." We're surprised Kyra didn't say something brilliant, like, "yeah, baby, maybe it'll be a week from Tuesday."

Bishop Spong, for those who are lucky enough never to have heard of him, has made a living out of bashing Christianity; this explains why he now teach at Harvard. As one might expect, he has a particular fondness for Catholicism. He is known for questioning Jesus' virgin birth and the Resurrection, which is on the order of an official of the Flat Earth Society questioning the flatness of the earth.

In his recently released autobiography, Spong blasted "strident fundamentalist Protestantism, an antiquated Roman Catholicism, and an irrelevant Orthodox tradition." He concluded, "I see no hope for a Christian future in any of them." What he really means is that he hopes the Christian future isn't shaped by these forces. No wonder he's depressed.

The good news is that both Navratilova and Spong are retired. The bad news is that they now have more time to indulge their fantasies in public than ever before. The good news is that their thoughts are so jaded that all but a few won't be able to see through them. The bad news is that those who work at CNN and attend Harvard are not in the majority.

WATCH THEM SQUIRM

As a condition of employment, anyone who works with Oprah Winfrey must agree never to say anything about her for the rest of his life. The TV personality makes her millions by exercising her freedom of speech rights everyday, but nonetheless insists on muzzling the free speech of all those who work with her. In doing so, she is not altogether different from actor Tom Cruise: he demands that those who interview him must first agree to give up their free speech rights by pledging never to say anything critical about him.

Wouldn't it be great if some bishop were to hold a press conference saying he agrees with those who criticize the Church for not getting with the times, and then announce that he's going to follow the lead of Winfrey and Cruise by mandating gag orders on everyone who works with him, as well as those who seek to interview him? And then watch them squirm.

eBay JUMPS THE GUN

The online auction site eBay jumped the gun by hawking memorabilia of John Cardinal O'Connor the minute it was learned that he died. When contacted by the press, William Donohue said "It's in very poor taste. They should have at least had the decency to wait until after the funeral." He went on to say that "This is a cheap exploitive move to make a quick buck. I'm not against the auctioning of these items, but there should be a waiting period."

LOGO MUST GO

People Express Inc., which is headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, offers chauffeured transportation services. That's all fine and good, but its logo must go. Pictured next to its name is a symbol that is virtually indistinguishable from the Chi-Rho, the Greek letters that represent Christ's name.

We have contacted the president, Robert Ortega, and await his reply. We made the point that the nightclub, House of Blues, once used the symbol of the Sacred Heart of Jesus but later modified its logo to satisfy our concerns. We hope Mr. Ortega proves to be just as reasonable.

MORE ON THE ETERNAL GOSPEL CHURCH

We've been fighting every anti-Catholic newspaper ad placed by the Eternal Gospel Church, a breakaway Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) sect. The Seventh Day Adventists have also been fighting with the offshoot, but their chosen venue is the courts. Understandably angered by the Eternal Gospel's use of "SDA" in its name, the Seventh Day Adventists recently won a round in court: a U.S. District judge ordered the Eternal Gospel Church to stop using the Seventh-Day Adventist name.

Meanwhile, our successive string of victories has come to a halt. After convincing many newspaper publishers not to accept any more of the Eternal Gospel Church's ads, we hit a

brick wall with the *Fresno Bee* and the *Oregonian* (the latter ran an ad by the Sweetwater Seventh-Day Adventist Church that is similar to the ones run by the Eternal Gospel Church).

Keith Moyer of the *Fresno Bee* and Patrick Stickel of the *Oregonian* are singing the ACLU song about freedom of speech. But this is not a free speech matter: no newspaper is obliged to run any ad by any group, which is precisely why Nazi ads and KKK ads would never see the light of day. Indeed, placing anti-abortion ads isn't easy these days.

Moyer said he would consider an article criticizing his decision to run the ads. We took him up on it but we haven't heard back whether he's going to run Bob Lockwood's submission. As for Mr. Stickel, William Donohue wrote him the following letter. He hasn't heard back either, and doesn't expect he will. Here's what he said: