

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

He was a likable person with plenty of charisma. His superiors thought highly of him even though they realized early on there was something terribly wrong with him. Indeed, he broke his vows over and over again. Yet for this all he got was a slap on the wrist. Then came the promotions. Many of them. Then the whole thing started all over again. Eventually, he was shipped off to someplace else but his new boss was told nothing about his transgressions. Sound familiar?

This is the case of Jayson Blair, the boy wonder reporter for the *New York Times* who was forced to resign in May. The top brass, Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd (some call them his rabbis, though others call them his bishops), knew of his problems and just shuffled him along. Their tolerance for Blair's intolerant behavior is now a scandal. The newspaper had to run more than 50 corrections in four years in response to Blair's work. At least 36 of the 73 articles he wrote were laden with fabrications, plagiarism and other deceitful practices. Yet he was promoted time and again.

Blair gave himself away early on when he showed up late for work dressed like a slob. He frequented a local tavern during work hours and got plenty of parking tickets. He charged both to the *New York Times* and no one did anything about it. Oh, yes, he was counseled. And he was given time off for his personal problems. But then he started all over again.

Blair took confidential files from the office and passed them around to his colleagues. Every time he was counseled, he was promoted. Then he got even worse, lying about his work. For this he was awarded another leave of absence. When he returned, his bosses read him the riot act, telling him to get to work on time, etc. He improved for a short time but then resorted to his old tricks.

As the whole world now knows, the way some in the Catholic Church dealt with a problem priest was to ship him off to a new diocese without ever notifying the new bishop of his recklessness. That's what the *New York Times* did to Blair—they first gave him a promotion and then shipped him elsewhere (their D.C. office), and never told his new boss about his recklessness. When those who transferred him got wind of his latest escapades, they did nothing. One of these old bosses later admitted, "we do not need to stigmatize people for seeking help." Sound familiar?

So Blair continued as usual, exploiting the good will of his superiors. Not only was he not reprimanded, but a letter praising him was put in his file. He was promoted again and then he did what he always did—lied, cheated and deceived those around him. Finally, his enabling bosses had enough and asked him to resign.

What gives? Duplicity, cover-ups, cowardice, privilege—these are just some of the attributes that come to mind. What's really amazing about all of this is that those involved always thought they could get away with it. Which only goes to show that arrogance can be deadly.

RELIGIOUS CLEANSERS ON THE MARCH

Those whose goal in life is to cleanse American society of all traces of religious expression are on the march again. Suburban Philadelphia is the site of a battle over the display of the Ten Commandments. The ACLU maintains that a Ten Commandments plaque on the façade of a Chester County

courthouse is an unconstitutional imposition of religion. Others say it is nothing more than a historical relic worth preserving. Interestingly, the U.S. Supreme Court building contains a frieze with a likeness of Moses carrying the commandments. In any event, a federal appeals court is weighing a decision.

On the other side of the state, outside Pittsburgh, a public school teacher is testing an 1895 law that bars teachers from wearing religious symbols or garb in the classroom. Religious cleansers from Americans United for Separation of Church and State like the law and want the Protestant teacher punished. The law was originally written to stop Catholic priests and nuns from teaching in the public schools.

Cadets at Virginia Military Institute (VMI) have been barred from saying a voluntary, nondenominational prayer before they eat. Americans United was delighted by the federal appeals court decision. The judges ruled that because VMI emphasizes discipline, there was nothing voluntary about the prayer. Talk about a Catch 22! What would a military academy be like if it didn't insist on discipline?

Two Southern California parks are fighting over the right to keep a large cross on public property. As a tribute to veterans, a large cross was erected in 1934 above the Mojave National Preserve. In another tribute to war vets, Mount Soledad Park has long been home to a 43-foot cross. The ACLU wants them both removed. The former battle has been waging since 2001; the latter since 1991.

None of these issues has anything to do with liberty. They have to do with religious cleansing. Scared to death of religion, they want state censorship of religious expression. That they are as phony as they are maniacal should be clear to everyone.

MASSACHUSETTS HIGH COURT REJECTS CLERGY ABUSE LAWSUIT

On April 30, the highest court in Massachusetts, the Supreme Judicial Court, dismissed a lawsuit brought by a woman who claims she was molested by a Catholic priest more than 40 years ago. In doing so, the Supreme Judicial Court overturned a decision by the state's Appeals Court that ruled in favor of the woman.

The decision by the state's highest court said that the statute of limitations had expired. It also said the woman should have filed her lawsuit earlier; she claimed a connection between the abuse and the emotional harm she says she endured.

We immediately sent the following news release to the press:

"It is impossible to say whether the woman in this case was delivered a morally unjust decision today. But one thing is certain: it would have been legally unjust to convict the accused, Rev. Gerard Creighton. The reason why we have a statute of limitations in law is precisely to guard against cases like this. How is the accused—always assumed innocent—supposed to defend himself against accusations made a long time ago (in this instance several decades ago) when witnesses are dead, memories have faded and personal vendettas may be at work?

"The U.S. Supreme Court will confront this issue directly in a case involving a California law that allows clergy sex abuse charges to be filed after the statute of limitations has expired. Right now there is nothing but confusion: last week a judge dropped a case against the Diocese of Palm Beach on

statute of limitations grounds (the case also applied to the Diocese of Rockville Centre). And just this week, the first lawsuit against the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for clergy sex abuse was filed by a man who says he was abused roughly 20 years ago by a priest.

“No one who has fairly watched the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church unfold would maintain that the Church has handled this problem well. But it must be said in equal firmness that the current environment is anything but fair to the Church. We hail today’s decision and look forward to the high court overturning the California law.”

WITCH HUNT AGAINST PRIESTS IN ERIE, PA

The northwestern Pennsylvania chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) has embarked on an aggressive campaign, posting signs on the front doors of Catholic schools throughout Erie County urging people to come forward with the names of molesting priests. Erie Bishop Donald Trautman labeled the unauthorized campaign as “reprehensible.” He accused those involved of invading private property and of scaring children.

We issued the following statement to the media on this issue:

“The national organization of SNAP has done some important work but the regional chapter in northwestern Pennsylvania is out of control and needs to be checked. The regional group has admitted that it cannot name one priest in Erie County who has been accused of abusing children, but that hasn’t stopped it from setting off the alarms. Given the lack of evidence, it

would make as much sense for the Erie branch of SNAP to target all houses of worship and sectarian schools with its inflammatory signs. That it has chosen to focus exclusively on Catholic schools is revealing: this is a witch hunt against Catholic priests.

“It cannot be said too many times that two-thirds of one percent of priests nationwide are currently under investigation for the sexual abuse of a minor. While one priest is too many, it smacks of bigotry to launch the kind of exploitative campaign that has begun in northwestern Pennsylvania: it unnecessarily frightens children and it unfairly stigmatizes priests. We look to the leadership of the national headquarters of SNAP to condemn this tactic for what it is—a media grandstanding event done at the expense of justice to innocent priests.”

It does not speak well for SNAP that its national leaders refused to condemn this behavior. Indeed, they condoned it.

BYPASSING YALE AND NYU

Harold Bloom is one of the most brilliant literary scholars alive. Known as the “Keeper of the Canon,” the 72 year-old Jewish atheist has decided to bequeath his priceless library and archives to a small Catholic school in Vermont, St. Michael’s. Why not Yale or NYU where he teaches? Because, he says, “with rare exceptions the universities and colleges in the English-speaking world that have sustained some sense of literature as a matter of powerful cognition and extraordinary aesthetic beauty tend to be the Roman Catholic institutions.” Well said.

NOVEL IDEAS

Dan Brown, author of the best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, has created quite a stir with some of his assertions. The book's hero, Robert Langdon, is out to prove himself innocent of a murder and goes in pursuit of the Holy Grail. But what he discovers is not what legend has said. Landon discovers secrets about Jesus, hidden in the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci, which the Catholic Church has been suppressing for two thousand years.

In the novel, Langdon is stalked by an Opus Dei priest who doesn't want Langdon to uncover the secret about the Catholic Church. The secret involves the notion that Jesus was not divine and that the Bible was written by a group of men with a political agenda. Readers also learn that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered the line of French kings, the Merovingians.

The author is anything but orthodox. When asked whether he is a Christian, he answered, "I am, although not in the most traditional sense of the word.... I consider myself a student of many religions." When asked about Opus Dei, he said, "While Opus Dei is a very positive force in the lives of many people, for others affiliation with Opus Dei has been a profoundly negative experience. Their portrayal in the novel is based on more than a dozen books written on Opus Dei as well as my own personal interviews with current and former members."

When asked if his book is anti-Catholic, the best he could offer was that he didn't mean it to be. "I'm fascinated with Christian History, and I wanted to build a thriller," he said. "It's a chase through Europe after the oldest and most famous and powerful secret that lives on today in popular culture."

His thoughts on Leonardo Da Vinci: "He had an unfortunate place in history of being born a modern man of reason in an age of religious fervor, when science was synonymous with heresy."

Brown's observations on the Catholic Church and women are quite revealing. For Brown, the Church has repressed both women and the feminine side of Christianity for centuries. For example, "Those deemed 'witches' by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any other women 'suspiciously attuned to the natural world.'" He also says that during three hundred years of witch hunts, "the Church burned at the stake an astounding five million women."

Most of Brown's novel ideas are of no real interest to the Catholic League. Unfortunately, however, there are millions of undiscerning Americans who find it difficult to separate fact from fiction. To believe that the Church burned five million witches is insane. It would mean that most of the female population of Europe would have been wiped out. Besides, it was not the Catholic Church that did most of the persecution of witches—it was civil authorities. And, in fact, the Protestant states persecuted witches with far more gusto than the Inquisition.

We agree with Brown on one thing: he is not a Christian in the most traditional sense of the word.

ANOTHER CURIOUS SURVEY

Taking a survey of Catholics is one of the most popular pastimes of the media. The way it works is that a series of questions are asked that seek to determine whether Catholics

agree with Church teachings on a host of issues, most of which deal with sex. Then the findings become grist for talk shows and media pundits of all stripes. Most important, Catholic malcontents and the Church's enemies love these surveys so they can demand radical changes (make them quick before the Church crashes!). A recent poll by the *Boston Globe* was no exception.

Without getting into the specifics, let's see how well you pass this test.

To begin with, you should know that according to the newspaper, there are four different types of Catholics: those who attend Mass weekly; those who attend monthly; those who attend yearly; and those who attend less than yearly. (Why the *Globe* didn't say of this last group "those who never attend," probably has something to do with its allergic reaction to negative-sounding phrases. But it makes us wonder: would they include whites in a poll of blacks simply because the white person identified himself as black?)

In any event, can you guess which one of these four types of Catholics is most likely to accept the Church's teachings? Very good. Now can you guess which is the least likely? Go to the head of the class.

On a more serious note, the one question we found mattered most was this: "Is your opinion of your parish priest extremely favorable, favorable, unfavorable, or extremely unfavorable?" Of those who never go to Mass, the combined figure for extremely favorable and favorable was 30 percent (which is itself a laugh since these dolts have no idea who their parish priest is). Of those who go weekly, the combined figure is 96 percent. We rest our case.

THE POLITICS OF THE HITLER MINISERIES

David K. Li of the *New York Post* had it just right when he observed last January that the Hitler miniseries, which aired May 18 and 20, “has been a public relations minefield for CBS.” From the time CBS announced it was going to do the movie, “Hitler: The Rise of Evil,” Jewish groups have been up in arms. Some questioned why it was necessary to do a TV portrait of Hitler while others wanted it squashed.

Before discussing the politics that colored the TV movie, it is worth noting that whenever the Catholic League has protested a play or movie it hasn’t seen (we typically have read the script), we have been blasted in the media for not waiting until we’ve seen it. But when Jewish groups protest a film they haven’t seen (nor a script that they’ve read), few entertainment critics carp. So much for fairness.

What Jewish groups feared most was the possibility that the movie might “humanize” Hitler. That is why they pressured CBS from the get-go: not until they were satisfied with the film would they back off. And they got what they wanted. The original script, met with disapproval, was scrapped altogether. A new screenwriter was hired and reliance on the Ian Kershaw biography of Hitler was scaled back. But this wasn’t all. CBS even went so far as to issue public service announcements during the telecast to promote tolerance. The network also made a generous donation to a Holocaust-related charity. These are the kinds of somersaults the networks are capable of doing. For some.

Consider how the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has approached the film. In July 2002, ADL national director Abraham Foxman questioned why there was a need for such a film, saying that “history has judged Hitler a monster.” “It’s distressing that

people would spend talent, time and money to make this man human," said Foxman. He then asked, "Why this rush to engage in this entertainment?"

Foxman not only questioned the wisdom of CBS doing a miniseries on Hitler, he questioned all such productions. "These are documentaries and films about Hitler the man, Hitler the lover, Hitler the young person," he said with disdain. "I find that trivializing and offensive," Foxman said.

In October 2002, ADL associate director Amy Levy chimed in by saying, "One has to wonder why there is a need for another movie about this man. Any new information that we can gauge on his childhood is not going to change the evil truth." To say she was frightened by this movie would be an understatement. Yet when the Catholic League complains about a show, we're told to lighten up—it's just a flick.

In December 2002, Foxman issued another public statement denouncing the movie. "Why the need or desire to make this monster human? The judgment of history is that he was evil, that he was responsible for millions of deaths." Again, no one branded him a censor.

But in the end, Foxman got what he wanted. The script was thoroughly rewritten, with an eye for suiting the ADL. On May 5, 2003, Foxman was able to say that the movie "teaches a significant lesson of history in a powerful way." Calling the portrayal of Hitler "brilliant," Foxman now was able to "commend CBS" for a job well done.

Foxman wasn't alone in his early objections to the film. Rabbi Marvin Hier, who heads the Simon Wiesenthal Center, expressed his concerns in September 2002. "The fear is," he said, "teenagers might say: 'He had a bad family life. It's not his fault. If they had taken him in art school, he wouldn't have been such a bad guy. He just got some bad breaks.'" In short, when it comes to portraying Hitler, all the environmental

reasons that help explain why someone acts the way he does should be carefully discarded.

Perhaps the biggest hypocrite of them all is *Newsday* TV critic Marvin Kitman. "I am so against this Hitler movie in advance," is what Kitman said last fall. "You just know what is going to happen. The only way TV can do criminals, sociopaths and monsters in its movies is to humanize them. No matter how evil a person, they all come out with a positive spin." He added, "I still don't think Adolf Hitler is ready for prime time." Perhaps he expects us to check in with him from time to time to see when, if ever, TV is ready for Hitler.

Kitman is the same guy who previously berated the Catholic League for protesting the ABC show "Nothing Sacred." In October 1997, he said the Catholic League didn't like the show because it portrayed the star, Father Ray, as "a priest with human failings." Not exactly. What we objected to was that Father Ray was a pro-abortion, hippie-dippie priest who engaged in violence, ripped off the poor and regularly defied Church teachings.

It should be noted that the Catholic League would sternly object to any portrayal of Hitler that would make him out to be anything but wholly responsible for his evil works. What we object to is the palpable double standard that is at work.

MESSAGE RECEIVED

Catholic League members often send us greeting cards they find offensive. If we agree, we contact the company that made them. If we see something really offensive, we let loose with a news release. There was no need for a news release when we saw a card made by Shade Tree Greetings, but we thought a letter

might be appropriate.

On the cover of the card there is a picture of two girls in Communion dresses with the inscription, "We were good little Catholic girls." On the inside it reads, "The emphasis is on WERE." A facsimile of the cover appears below:



In our letter to the chairman of the company, we began by saying "It is our belief that your company would not intentionally single out Catholics for ridicule." (Rather coy, isn't it?) We then asked if he could send us any cards that depict "rabbis, imams or members of other religious groups in a similar light." We were kind enough to thank him in advance.

He immediately called us and apologized profusely. Indeed, we thought the poor devil was going to have a heart attack. It's fair to say he got the message.

VOUCHERS GAIN MOMENTUM

All across the nation the push for school vouchers is gaining momentum. While vouchers are resisted by the public school establishment, it appears that the unions can no longer hold back the tide. The people want choices and they are growing in numbers.

In New York City, where the public schools have long failed inner-city youth, the demand for vouchers is now being pushed by the corporate elite. Richard Cavanagh is president of The Conference Board, a group of corporate leaders. He recently surveyed 23 corporate titans on the subject of school vouchers. Nearly every one of them was in favor of some type of voucher plan.

Cavanagh discussed his findings with New York Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, the New York Department of Education's chief executive of strategic partnerships. Klein, however, says he still prefers charter schools for children. But it was clear that he was being pushed to do more than this.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is home to a successful voucher program, and now state lawmakers are seeking ways to expand the program. Critics of the voucher program say it is too expensive, especially at a time when Wisconsin (like all other states) is experiencing a budget crisis. But voucher supporters point to figures that show vouchers to be cheaper than funding public education.

Wisconsin spends \$4,917 per child in the public schools; the amount of the voucher is \$3,181.

Colorado is moving forward with an ambitious voucher program

that may prove to be a model for the rest of the country. Led by Governor Bill Owens, who signed the bill in April, the new program will “literally open the door of opportunity to thousands of our children.” The head of the local teacher education association said that the new opportunities for minorities represent “a sad day for our children.”

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough occurred in Washington, D.C., when Mayor Anthony Williams did a sudden about-face and announced his support for school vouchers. On May 1, Mayor Williams stunned activists on both sides of this issue when he said he was prepared to work with federal officials in seeking to expand school choice. He was immediately blasted by D.C. Delegate and former ACLU official Eleanor Holmes Norton. She accused Williams of “selling out.”

The one setback occurred in Louisiana where lawmakers up for election feared the wrath of the teacher unions and decided to effectively table the issue until after the election.

But for the most part, those who have sold out African American children—to the teacher unions—now have their back to the wall. The idea that black parents might opt to send their kids to a Catholic school remains a frightening thought to those wedded to the unions. Not everyone who is anti-voucher is anti-Catholic but too many are. Their days, however, appear to be numbered.