

“DA VINCI CODE” SHROUDED IN SECRECY

The Associated Press recently observed that Dan Brown “has given few interviews,” something the *New York Daily News* explains by calling him a “reclusive author.” But if Brown is naturally reticent, the same is not true of those working on the film version of Brown’s book: their silence is a calculated and well-coordinated decision.

In May 2005, *Variety* tried to squeeze some juice from the movie’s director and producers. They didn’t get a squirt. “We’ve made a pact...where we have numbered scripts and everything is extremely confidential,” admitted co-producer Brian Grazer. So what about Father Richard McBrien, the Notre Dame theologian who was given a copy of the screenplay? McBrien said he was under contractual obligations not to talk. By August 2005, the *New York Times* would write that “Sony has dropped a scrim of secrecy” over the film. Indeed, the *Times* reported that “The script has been closely controlled. Outsiders have been banned from the set. And those associated with the film have had to sign confidentiality agreements.”

As we got closer to the film’s premiere, the secrecy continued. *Time* recently noted that critics expected to see the movie in April, but have since learned that they’re being shut out. *Entertainment Weekly* adds that “Virtually everything about [the movie]...has been kept double top secret from the public.” Indeed, even the room where the final editing is taking place is marked “DENTAL RECORDS,” further proof of how mysterious everything is.

And they say the Catholic Church is secretive? But who could be more secretive than everyone associated with the “Da Vinci Code” enterprise? Not Opus Dei—a timely issue of *People* got it

right when it referred to the lay organization as a “once-secret group.”

“How ironic it is,” noted Bill Donohue, “that the most uptight persons involved in this whole affair are the laid-back types in Hollywood? By contrast, the Catholic Church is an open book.

PUBLIC SCHOOL STAGES ANTI-CATHOLIC PLAY

The H-B Woodlawn Program, an alternative high school in Arlington, Virginia, presented three performances of “The Marriage of Bette and Boo,” by Christopher Durang. The play is not new, having first been presented in 1985. The fact that it is offensive to Catholics is not very surprising; playwright Durang has a history of writing stories with an anti-Catholic message.

Rather, the question the Catholic League is asking is “Why is such a play still being performed?” Here are excerpts from some reviews of “The Marriage of Bette and Boo.”

One reviewer wrote, “Who bears the blame for such unmitigated misery? The Catholic Church? It appears to be one of Durang’s contentions.” (*St. Petersburg Times*, 10-7-87) In the same review, one of the characters is quoted, “Catholics aren’t allowed to use birth control. That must be a joke on someone.”

Another reviewer assessed “The Marriage of Bette and Boo” as follows: “Durang has something to say about marriage, parenthood and religion (specifically, Catholicism), and the picture he paints of all three is not pretty.” (*Omaha World*

Herald, 6-29-02)

The priest character in the play is not spared: "And heaven help those who seek solace from the neighborhood priest. As Father Donnally explains, he is powerless to do anything except 'mumble platitudes' to the 'stupid people' who come to him with 'insoluble problems.'" (*New York Times*, 5-17-85)

Other review excerpts, unable to be included because of length, echo the previous excerpts: the messages of "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" are that the Catholic Church is to blame for these everyday problems and is helpless to do anything about them.

We sent a letter to the superintendent of Arlington Public Schools, and a copy of the same letter to H-B Woodlawn's principal. We included excerpts from a number of reviews of the "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" (including the above excerpts) and asked the superintendent if he thought the play was appropriate for a public school to present. We also asked that if he did think that play was appropriate, what plays did he think were inappropriate. We are awaiting a response.

The Catholic League wonders why these plays are continuously presented. We ask, what would happen if a high school presented a play that attacked the Jewish or Muslim faiths? People of those respective faiths would be outraged, just as we at the Catholic League are over the presentation of "The Marriage of Bette and Boo."

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NOT EVERYONE IS LAUGHING

The front page of the March 31 edition of the Baylor University student newspaper, *The Lariat*, featured a photograph of a man dressed as a pregnant nun. The picture was taken at an event on the Texas school’s campus at which the president of the university, Dr. John M. Lilley, was inducted into the NoZe Brotherhood.

The image understandably offended many Catholics, as it ridiculed a vocation that Catholics take very seriously and a commitment that religious women take seriously. Worse, we learned that at a recent meeting with the editors of *The Dallas Morning News*, Dr. Lilley said the best way to handle things like this was just to laugh it off.

It appears, however, that Baylor administration selectively applies the policy of laughing things off.

Baylor sent e-mail to students in April reminding them that associating with a magazine that goes against Baylor’s mission would be a clear violation of the University’s code of conduct. The letter was a response to *Playboy*’s attempt to recruit models from Baylor for an upcoming issue of the magazine. Back in 2002, Baylor suspended one of its fraternities after a number of the fraternity’s members posed fully clothed in the magazine.

Additionally, students have complained about photographs they say perpetuate negative black stereotypes. These photographs

were taken at an off-campus party held last September and were posted on Facebook.com. Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity members attended this party. Dr. Jim Henderson, Sigma Alpha Epsilon's adviser, was quoted in *The Lariat*, "What we need to be doing is addressing this issue in a public forum...."

According to Baylor's Student Policies and Procedures, "Expression that is inappropriate in the setting of Baylor University and in opposition to the Christian ideals which it strives to uphold" is one example of misconduct.

In a letter to Dr. Lilley citing the above statement, Dr. Donohue said, "A male student dressing up as a pregnant nun is certainly not an image of Christian ideals. How can you say it's best to 'laugh off' such an image?"

Donohue ended his letter by citing several comments made by faculty and students objecting to this incident. We are awaiting a response from Dr. Lilley.

Bishop Gregory Aymond of Austin is also awaiting a response. He wrote a strong, yet fair, letter to Dr. Lilley.

GRATUITOUS ASSAULTS NEVER JUSTIFIED

The cover story reveals how popular it is to bash Christianity these days, especially Catholicism. But it also tells us that even when Christianity has absolutely nothing to do with some hot-button issue, it gets dumped on nonetheless.

Unfortunately, unprovoked attacks on Christianity are not confined to bigoted college students.

The *Weekly Standard* is a cogent journal of conservative thought. We were surprised to learn, then, that one of its writers, Duncan Currie, would seek to legitimate a Christian-bashing episode of "South Park" simply because it showed the hypocrisy of Comedy Central. We are pleased, however, that the magazine published Bill Donohue's response.

Donohue accused Currie of seeking to justify an episode of the cartoon that depicted "Jesus defecating on the president and the American flag on the grounds that South Park creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker were angry at Comedy Central for not airing a depiction of Muhammad."

What angered Donohue was Currie's remark saying that the president of the Catholic League "missed the point entirely: It wasn't Jesus being mocked, it was Comedy Central." It would be more accurate to say that as a way of demonstrating the double standard at Comedy Central, the creators of the cartoon decided to mock Jesus.

In his letter, Donohue drew a parallel with the University of Oregon incident, offering a description of the offending *Insurgent* issue. He concluded by saying, "Although it is entirely legitimate to highlight hypocrisy over the Danish cartoons, attempts to do so by gratuitously trashing Christianity, as Stone, Parker, and the student newspaper editors do, are plainly unjustified."

One more thing: Why did Stone, Parker and the *Insurgent* editors choose to bash Catholicism to make their point and not some other group? We think we know why, and they know it as well.

TWO NEW PLAYS TARGET CATHOLICISM

Catholic-bashing is rampant at the smaller theaters in this country. Tiny playhouses, often better known for their outrageousness than the quality of their productions, love to mock and assault the faith we hold dear. Two new additions recently joined the ever-growing menu of anti-Catholic fare dished up by the avant-garde.

"Mary, Like a Virgin: a Divine Musical Experience" played at Dillon's Lounge in New York City from March through May. According to the play's promotional materials, a transvestite playing the Blessed Mother reveals the "sometimes hazy details of her relationship with God, her adventures with Joseph, the deliverance of Christ, the aftermath of his death, her struggle with eating disorders, and a life in show business." All this to a backbeat of rap and pop music.

As can be expected, the performers involved in this work are hardly coming from the Royal Shakespeare Company. The man who plays Mary, Brandon Chapman (aka Mimi Imfurst), is currently developing another act called "The Space Odyssey of Nipple Delight." The director, Daniel "Sweetie" Booth, has presented such works as "Vampire Lesbians of Sodom" and "Twisted Nonsense."

And lest you think it is only on the coasts where bashing the Catholic Church is seen as a popular sport for the theater types, look to Omaha, Nebraska. The SNAP/Shelterbelt Theater presented "Defending Marriage" in April and May. Though "Defending Marriage" is not a vile assault on the Virgin Mary, it does use the character of an actively homosexual priest to advance a pro-gay marriage agenda.

"Defending Marriage" gives the audience Father Pat, a gay

Catholic priest whose boyfriend of ten years, Gene, is an ex-seminarian. Father Pat is torn between loyalty to his church and his boyfriend when his bishop calls on him to spearhead a ballot campaign for traditional marriage. To add to Father Pat's troubles, Carmen, the rectory's housekeeper (who is separated from an abusive husband—she “can't afford” an annulment—and in love with a Methodist), walks in on him and Gary in a lip lock.

Joe Basque, the author of “Defending Marriage,” says he was upset when the Archdiocese of Omaha raised money to support an amendment to the state constitution barring gay marriage. Rather than try to formulate some sort of argument in favor of gay marriage (or for why the Church shouldn't campaign against it), Basque chose to create a fictional world where he can take all the cheap shots he likes.

We have not protested these works for the simple reason that we do not want to draw any attention to them. Major productions, of course, are already in the public eye. If they knock the Church, we will bite back. Works like “Mary, Like a Virgin” and “Defending Marriage,” however, have a rather limited audience as it is. While it is important for us to let our friends know that they exist, we think the best course of action is to pay them little mind. Let this sort of trash flounder into obscurity on its own accord.

DEMOCRATS TO CLERGY: SHUT UP OR LOSE TAX-EXEMPT STATUS

In a recent edition of the Christian Science Monitor, Democratic National Committee (DNC) chairman Howard Dean was

quoted as saying, "The religious community has to decide whether they want to be tax exempt or involved in politics." We immediately released the following statement to the media:

"Howard Dean's ultimatum to priests, ministers, rabbis and other members of the clergy plays to the stereotype of Democrats as the party of the faithless. Dean knows full well that houses of worship and religious organizations are afforded a tax-exempt status by the IRS for the same reason that colleges, universities, foundations, non-profit organizations and most hospitals are—they service the public good. He also knows that tax-exempt institutions are not allowed to endorse or contribute to candidates for public office, and that a mechanism is in place to punish those who violate this condition. And he must know that members of the clergy do not forfeit their First Amendment right to freedom of speech simply because of their clerical status. So what is his point other than to chill the speech of the clergy?

"This kind of demagoguery is not an isolated instance. For example, on April 19, the DNC announced a new radio ad campaign aimed at the Spanish-speaking community on the subject of immigration reform. The position that the Democrats have staked out on this issue is something many Americans, myself included, feel is superior to that of the Republicans. That is why it is so distressing to read the DNC's statement on this matter: it literally accuses Republicans of supporting a plan that would 'criminalize immigrants, families, doctors, and even churches just for giving communion.' (My italics.) This is a lie—there is not one scintilla of evidence to support the idea that if the Democrats don't win on this issue then we are faced with the prospect of cops arresting priests for giving Holy Communion to illegal immigrants.

"If Howard Dean is the true voice of the Democratic party on matters religious, they're in big trouble."

COMEDY CENTRAL STRIKES AGAIN

Comedy Central is a regular forum for attacks on the Catholic Church, and its most recent culprit is standup comedian Carlos Mencia. His weekly program, "Mind of Mencia," features frequent segments that ridicule Catholics and Church officials.

The first of three most recent incidents occurred March 12 during his standup special "No Strings Attached." The stage featured, in its backdrop, a 20-foot-tall marionette of a lollipop-holding pedophile priest. Mencia's act also included a five minute segment on the death of Pope John Paul II and how he is now having sex in heaven.

During his special, a commercial for the upcoming season of "Mind of Mencia" centered on a priest ogling Boy Scouts. Before Mencia can make a comment on the priest, a voice over gives the following statement: "Warning: The contents of Carlos Mencia's mind may contain jokes about religious figures and their hobbies. Not recommended for people who write hate mail. You think it, Carlos says it."

Mencia kicked off the second season of his program on March 22 with a mock confession asking for forgiveness for all of the hurtful things that he said during the first season. An unseen priest tells him that God wants him to go further in his attacks on Catholics and other groups. After Mencia leaves the confessional reassured that what he had said during the first season was not wrong, the confessional door opens up to reveal that the priest was actually the Devil.

On May 3, Mencia took aim at Jesus in a "Da Vinci Code" inspired segment called "That's F#*king Historical." It was a

takeoff of a History Channel-type program and portrayed Jesus' life as if he was actually married to Mary Magdalene. The segment contained four individual skits where Mencia played the part of Jesus. The first skit featured Jesus performing a miracle to obtain a vase, that Mary wanted, for free. In the second skit Mary gives Jesus a makeover that includes a pink robe; this leads to apostles Matthew and Luke making fun of him. Skit number three has Jesus and Mary at home in a fight and Jesus calls on his father, God, for help in a whinny child's voice. God offers some advice, but abandons Jesus after being called away by a female's voice. The final skit featured Jesus returning home to Mary after his resurrection and Mary asking where he had been. Mary also accuses Jesus of cheating on her and when she leaves the room, Jesus begs his father, again in a whinny child's voice, to take him home.

Mencia and Comedy Central feel that it is open season on Catholicism. The constant attacks from Mencia and other Comedy Central programs demonstrate the station's continual hostility towards Catholics.

COLORADO ABUSE BILL SCRATCHED

On May 4, Colorado lawmakers finally decided to scratch a controversial section of a child sex abuse bill that was under consideration.

House representatives in the Colorado legislature rejected a proposal that would have allowed a one-year window for alleged victims of child sexual molestation to sue for cases dating back to 1971. It was a victory for justice, led by Archbishop Charles Chaput, Bishop Michael Sheridan and Bishop Arthur Tafoya. And special thanks must also be given to those cocky

lawmakers who thought that by extending the law to cover public institutions, it would force the Catholic side to retreat.

“What has been happening in Colorado will go down in history as one of most egregious examples of anti-Catholicism ever launched by state lawmakers,” we told the media.

It began when three bills were introduced earlier this year that sought to single out the Catholic Church for punitive measures. The bills were aimed at either removing or modifying statutes of limitation in cases of child sexual abuse committed by those who work for private institutions. Everyone conceded that the bills were targeted at the Catholic Church. When the Catholic bishops rightfully objected to these discriminatory measures, the bills were amended to blanket public institutions. This relieved the immediate concerns of the bishops, though as later amendments were introduced, they registered principled objections to some provisions.\

The public school establishment’s insurance agents started sweating bullets once they learned that their clients could be sued, and it was their resistance that proved crucial in killing the bill. In other words, those who feigned interest in protecting the kids proved to be far more interested in protecting their pocket books.

A new bill that would hold churches and nonprofits liable for up to \$732,500 in these lawsuits was briefly entertained. The amount of damages for public schools, however, was capped at \$150,000. “We’d love to see what would happen,” we said in our news release, “if the figures were reversed.”

State Senator Joan Fitz-Gerald, and Rep. Gwyn Green, both Democrats, pledged to push for similar legislation next year. We’ll be ready.

“OPIE AND ANTHONY” RETURN

When CBS radio announced in late April that the “Opie and Anthony” radio show was returning after a four-year hiatus, Bill Donohue surprised many radio critics by welcoming them back. Here’s what happened.

After Donohue lashed out at “Opie and Anthony” for providing an on-air account of a sexual stunt in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in 2002, they were fired by Infinity Broadcasting, the CBS Radio outlet. Once they were dumped, Donohue withdrew the complaint that he had filed with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and asked the FCC to drop its investigation.

On August 5, 2004, Donohue issued a news release about the decision of XM Satellite Radio to pick up the duo beginning October 4 of that year. At that time he said, “We wish Opie and Anthony well and trust they have learned their lesson.”

In the year-and-a-half that Opie and Anthony were on XM Satellite, not a single complaint reached our office about anything they said. Indeed, when the two shock jocks were picked up by XM, their producer called one morning and asked Donohue if he would go on the air with them. Though he had some reservations, he said yes, and was immediately put through. They made it clear that they regretted the St. Patrick’s stunt. All three mixed it up for a bit and had a great time.

Days before CBS picked up “Opie and Anthony” again, Anthony Cumia, aka “Anthony,” called Donohue to say that he and Greg “Opie” Hughes wanted a “fresh start.” He made it clear that the Catholic bashing that they previously engaged in was a thing of the past. Donohue said fine.

Donohue was then invited on the new "Opie and Anthony" show as their first guest. The interview, complete with many light moments, drew applause from many quarters. But not everyone approved. When asked by some critics why he was so forgiving, Donohue replied that forgiveness is something special in the Catholic religion; it would be unfair to reject their apology, he reasoned, especially given their apparent sincerity.

By the way, one of those who complained that Donohue was going too easy on the two was none other than Howard Stern. Stern, who was sued by CBS after he left for another radio gig, said he was surprised by Donohue's reaction given the St. Patrick's stunt. Donohue called Stern a fraud on "Opie and Anthony" for feigning interest in anti-Catholicism.

This explains why in our news release, we ended by saying, "In short, the Catholic League hopes Opie and Anthony have a great run on CBS Radio."