

CATHOLIC DEMOCRATS CHIDE POPE

Eighteen Democratic members of Congress sent out a statement dated May 10 criticizing Pope Benedict XVI for his supposed stance on Catholic politicians and abortion.

The Democrats chided the pope for allegedly agreeing with Mexican bishops for invoking excommunication in dealing with Catholic lawmakers who voted to legalize abortion.

These Democrats are twice a disgrace. First, they have their facts wrong: no Mexican bishop ever invoked excommunication against any lawmaker for legalizing abortion. What happened was at first confusing, but was quickly clarified.

On May 9, speaking aboard a plane flying to Brazil, the pope initially gave the impression that he favored excommunication of the Mexican lawmakers. Later that same day his remarks were amended, making moot the idea that he favored such a penalty.

On May 10, the Vatican presented the pope's official statement. That statement did not speak to excommunicating anyone—it simply restated Church teaching that Catholic legislators who advocate legalized abortion should refrain from taking Communion. Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman on the scene, said that “if the bishops haven't excommunicated anyone, it's not that the pope wants to do so.”

The Catholic Democrats who signed the statement had plenty of time to get their facts straight. But in a defensive rush to judgment, they decided to take their game to the pope; thus did they disgrace themselves a second time.

“Advancing respect for life and for the dignity of every human being is, as our church has taught us, our own life's mission,” the Democrats said. It's not easy to reconcile that position with their voting record on abortion, which includes (in many instances) opposition to the partial-birth abortion

ban. Evidently, respecting the life and dignity of every human being doesn't extend to children who are 80 percent born.

These Catholic Democrats need to hire some fact checkers. And while they're at it, it might be good for them to hire a practicing Catholic bioethicist.

JERRY FALWELL, R.I.P.

The Rev. Jerry Falwell, one of America's most prominent religious leaders, passed away on May 15 at the age of 73.

Jerry Falwell did more to mobilize evangelicals than any other leader in the nation. He not only inspired them to become active politically, he encouraged them to rethink their positions on a host of issues, especially abortion and school choice.

In 1979, Falwell established the Moral Majority, welcoming Roman Catholics into the organization. He also founded Liberty University, an institution of higher education that quickly made its mark on American society.

Falwell was a great fighter in the culture wars. He was both an exemplary evangelical and a renowned social activist, always exuding the kind of moral courage so often lacking in religious leaders of all faiths. He will be sorely missed.

THE POLITICS OF PBS

Hiding the truth about something is just as dishonest as telling a lie. Last month, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was guilty of both forms of dishonesty.

On May 1, Catholic League president Bill Donohue attended a private screening of "Islam vs. Islamists: Voices from the Muslim Center" and was impressed at how the film shows that most Muslims are not terrorists. PBS officials consider the film to be "alarmist," though, and have refused to air it.

The only thing alarmist about this film is PBS—a public entity that takes taxpayer money for an allegedly public service but spikes a documentary that does not accord with its politics. In the insular world in which PBS officials live, the real Muslims are Islamists—radical extremists who want to kill the infidel (read: mostly Jews and Christians). Yet this documentary demonstrates that most Muslims are not extremists. Which begs the question: Is PBS anti-Muslim for trying to censor this look at the way most Muslims live?

Pope Benedict XVI was unfairly criticized last year for citing Islam as a religion that too often allows reason to become unbuckled from faith. "Islam vs. Islamists" offers proof that he was right. It also shows, as the Holy Father understands, that most Muslims do not incline to violence.

By casting extreme Islamists as unrepresentative of Muslims, "Islam vs. Islamists" is able to do more to generate positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Western world than anything PBS has previously aired. Yet so far PBS has kept it off the air, thus contributing to the ugly stereotype that most Muslims are machete-wielding thugs.

PBS had no qualms, however, about airing the docudrama, "The Secret Files of the Inquisition," on May 9 and May 16. What many people have heard or read about the Catholic Church

during the Inquisition just isn't true—that's what honest historians say—but this mattered little to PBS. It advertised "The Secret Files of the Inquisition" on its website with an eerie black background depicting all the "T's" as crosses. All that was missing was Dracula's voiceover. "For over half a millennium a system of mass terror reigned," the PBS website said. "Thousands were subject to secret courts, torture and punishment." This is plainly dishonest.

As British historian Henry Kamen has shown in his magisterial work, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, almost all the conventional wisdom about the Inquisition is wrong. By comparison with secular courts at the time, the Inquisition's methods were more humane, e.g., defendants could be represented by an attorney. Edward Peters, another student of the period, says, "Modern historiography has completely blown the old Inquisition propaganda out of the water. No one seriously contends that hundreds of thousands or millions were killed, or that the Protestant countries were any more humane than Spain was."

Indeed, scholars today refer to the old school mythology as "the Black Legend," a tale of anti-Catholic lies spun by Elizabethan England. No wonder that in 1994, BBC/A&E aired "The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition."

Of the approximately 125,000 cases tried by the Spanish Inquisition, 1 percent resulted in the death penalty. Of the so-called witch hunts, where women were burned at the stake, secular courts executed 50,000 (not all of whom were women); fewer than 100 were killed by the Inquisition.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once compared the killings that took place in the Soviet Union in 1937 and 1938 to those that took place during the Spanish Inquisition. He found that 20,000 were killed per month in the U.S.S.R. and 10 were killed per month during the Inquisition. But don't look for such comparisons on PBS. To do so might get in the way of the

truth.

So there it is—PBS denies the public a positive glimpse into the lives of everyday Muslims, while airing an anti-Catholic smear flick. It's hard to miss the politics behind the programming decisions made at PBS.

SENATOR LEAHY RESPONDS TO POPE

Every organization has its bad apples and dirty laundry, but most people know that this alone doesn't disqualify any group of people from exercising the freedoms of speech and religion. Unless that group is the Catholic Church, that is—plenty of people use the sex abuse scandal to try to silence the Church, especially when the Church voices opinions that these people don't like.

When asked on May 9 about the pope's comments regarding possible excommunication of Catholic politicians who support abortion rights, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) said, "I've always thought also that those bishops and archbishops who for decades hid pederasts and are now being protected by the Vatican should be indicted."

If Senator Leahy's comments reflect the new face of the religion-friendly Democratic Party, the party has a long way to go.

“FAMILY GUY” OFFENDS

Literally thousands of incidents involving “creative liberties” with Catholic practices have come to the attention of the Catholic League over the years. Many of them are minor in nature, if not entirely innocent. However, the April 29 episode of the Fox TV show, “Family Guy,” definitely crossed a line.

The program assaulted and demeaned the Eucharist, with references such as “cookies” and “punch” being used when speaking about the Body and Blood of Christ. Such language is unacceptable, even in a cartoon show.

Calling Catholics “wafer-munchers” was also insulting, but nothing was worse than a depiction of the Eucharist being vomited on the church floor.

Also featured was a portrayal of a priest threatening a baby with violence for crying during Mass; church members were shown thinking the baby needed an exorcism.

Innocent jokes about a religion are fine, but it’s out of bounds when a faith is demeaned as horrendously as Catholicism was on “Family Guy.”

This wasn’t the first time the Catholic League has had to deal with “Family Guy.” An episode in December 2005, for instance, disparaged the sacrament of Baptism and the use of Holy Water. An April 2000 episode featured an offensive remark about Holy Communion.

We contacted Peter Liguori, President of Entertainment at Fox Broadcasting, about the situation. We were awaiting a response at press time.

CARTOON GUILTY OF ANTI-CATHOLICISM



After the Supreme Court upheld the partial birth abortion ban on April 18, Bill Donohue predicted that anti-Catholic bigots would “go bonkers over the fact that all five of the justices who voted against infanticide are Roman Catholic.” Donohue’s prediction was right on target.

Most of the bigots expressed their anti-Catholicism orally or in print. But at least one, Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Tony Auth, did so artistically. Auth’s contribution to the anti-Catholic bigotry that followed the Supreme Court decision appears above. His cartoon was published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and in the online version of the *New York Times* on April 20.

OBAMA = THEOCRAT?

On April 30, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story on Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama and his spiritual journey to Christianity. The Catholic League questioned whether Senator Obama wants the U.S. to become a theocracy:

If the same standard that was applied to President George W. Bush were to be applied to Senator Obama, then Obama must be

considered a theocrat who shows no respect for the separation of church and state. What else could one conclude after seeing a color photo of him on the front page of the Times on April 30, preaching from the pulpit of a Christian church? The *Times* article itself was even more indicting.

Obama's spiritual mentor is the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., a radical minister who blames the United States for the war in Iraq. So controversial is Rev. Wright that Obama shunned him when he announced his bid for the presidency. It makes one wonder how the media will follow up on this: after all, when Mel Gibson was being criticized for making "The Passion of the Christ," his foes constantly demanded that he denounce his father's views on the Holocaust.

Surely Rev. Wright—who has played a pivotal role in shaping Obama's thinking—should be subjected to at least the same scrutiny. And surely Obama should be asked to denounce Wright's radical views, including his position that white racism can be found in Zionism.

Obama began his presidential campaign by saying, "Giving all praise and honor to God," and it didn't raise an eyebrow among the guardians of the separation of church and state. But when Bush said that Jesus was his favorite philosopher, the guardians went ballistic. Indeed, Obama was able to compare himself to Joshua, and no one blinked.

The day before the *Times* piece ran, Obama blasted the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq while preaching at a Christian church. Now imagine a pro-life Republican candidate speaking at a Catholic church denouncing the Democrats for supporting partial-birth abortions. And imagine the reaction he would receive if there were a color photo of him on the front page of the *New York Times* speaking at Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

The double standard is nauseous, and it smacks of

religious *and* racial prejudice.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN LOSES

In May, the University of Wisconsin-Madison agreed to pay \$250,000 in student fees next year to the University of Wisconsin Roman Catholic Foundation to settle its religious discrimination lawsuit.

The Catholic group, which has existed on the campus since 1883, was deemed ineligible by the university because some of its board members were not students and because the group allegedly violated a university policy governing nondiscrimination; membership in the group is limited to Catholics.

The former complaint was easily rectified, leaving on the table the serious matter of religious autonomy. The Catholic organization scored a victory in April when U.S. District Court Judge John Shabaz ruled that the university had violated the group's right to freedom of association. The settlement came in early May.

Also in April, the University of Wisconsin-Superior agreed to pay \$20,000 in legal fees when it lost in its bid not to recognize the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship; the university complained that leadership positions were limited to Christians.

The Alliance Defense Fund, an ally of the Catholic League, won both University of Wisconsin lawsuits. David French, whose work was featured in last month's Catalyst, won both cases.

Interestingly, Jewish and Muslim groups have never encountered

the kind of harassment shown to Catholic and evangelical groups. There is something seriously wrong at the University of Wisconsin (it is hardly alone) that it takes lawsuits for Catholics and evangelicals to have clubs staffed by—of all people—Catholics and evangelicals.

NUN AD GETS DUMPED

Washington Mutual is a bank that recently ran an advertisement on the radio that offended many listeners. The radio ad, which played in Sacramento, California and other places on the west coast, featured a ruler-wielding nun as a mortgage lender. Every time a man asked her a question about his mortgage, the nun would say “no” to the crack of her ruler.

This was far from the worst incident that we’ve encountered, but when some of our members said they were offended and asked for our help, we contacted the company. We are happy to say that the ad has been pulled. A woman from the bank’s PR office called to apologize.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD RIPS OFF ANGELS

Planned Parenthood Golden Gate (PPGG) released a “Safe is Sexy” television advertisement in April that features a young couple being interrupted from having unprotected sex by their Guardian Angels.

The ad, slated to appear on MTV, VH1 and FX, shows a sloppy-looking male angel eating popcorn at the head of the bed watching in delight. Then a female angel appears, imploring the male angel to do something. He accesses a TV remote and rewinds the scene of the couple in bed. This time the woman asks her male partner if he has any protection, to which he exclaims, "Yeah, of course." She responds, "Amen!"

Given the moral hollowness of Planned Parenthood, it was not surprising to learn that it was now in the business of hijacking religious imagery to pander its sex-without-consequences message. But as with PETA before it, the anti-natal salesmen will find that the faithful will tune them out.

Ironically, while PPGG was ripping off Guardian Angels, the California chapter of Planned Parenthood was lobbying to defeat the "Missing Angels Act." This bill, which has been pushed by women who have experienced stillbirth, would require a certificate of birth when this occurs. Currently, all states are required to issue a death certificate for a stillbirth; they also require the family to bury or cremate the baby.

But as Joanne Cacciatore, who is in charge of the Missing Angels Foundation, has said, "How in the world do states ethically justify telling someone they have to bury someone who they are not willing to say existed?"

What really galls Planned Parenthood is the fear that the bill would clearly help the pro-life movement by acknowledging the humanity of the unborn child; the bill says the fetus must have advanced past 20 weeks of gestation.

It looks like the only kinds of angels that Planned Parenthood wants to affirm are those that promote its deadly agenda. Planned Parenthood is to religion what matricide is to Mother's Day.