

HEATHER GRAHAM'S SEXUAL HANG-UPS

Actress Heather Graham, of "Austin Powers" fame, took to bashing the Catholic Church in an interview in the February edition of *Talk* magazine.

As reported in the *New York Post*, Graham blames the Church for stifling her sex life when she was growing up. "Why do I have to do what all these men are saying? Why is a women's sexuality supposed to be evil?"

William Donohue couldn't resist commenting on Graham's remarks to the media:

"Poor Heather. Life has been so unfair to her. Having been subjected to the sexual reticence of the Catholic Church, she is now free as a bird to throw off all her shackles. So she now accepts film roles posing either as a slut or a porn star, reducing herself so low that she actually partook in a 'butt licking' scene with Robert Downey Jr. in 'Two Girls and a Guy.' But much to Heather's chagrin, that scene never made it past the censors. No doubt they were Catholic.

"It is our hope that Heather soon gets a grip on her sexual hang-ups. She doesn't need therapy, just some counseling by a priest."

We were delighted to learn that *Time* magazine liked Donohue's snappy line and printed an excerpt in its January 15 edition. It credited Donohue with "Best Punch" remark in its "Feud of the Week" section. Many newspapers also ran Donohue's comment, including London's *Guardian*.

TOO MUCH RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

When William Donohue learned that the New York State Legislature was considering a bill that would mandate all employers to provide contraceptive health insurance coverage for its employees, he personally wrote to every member arguing that a religious conscience protection clause be included. Catholic health care organizations, he said, should have the right to opt out of any mandated contraceptive and infertility coverage.

Donohue made the point that “just as it is wrong for a religious institution to strong-arm state agencies to bow to religious precepts, it is wrong for the state to coerce religious institutions to accept programs that effectively vitiate their *raison d’être*.”

Donohue was most upset with a remark by Sheldon Silver, the Assembly Speaker. Silver said that a religious conscience exemption would be “taking religious freedom a little too far.” Donohue asked Silver to explain to Roman Catholics “why he thinks their rights are being pushed too far.”

We await a decision by the legislature.

BUSH’S FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS TRIGGER STRONG REACTION

One week into his presidency, President George W. Bush spoke in favor of using faith-based social service programs to tackle many of the nation’s social problems. His idea of creating a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community

Initiatives triggered a strong reaction from pundits and activists alike.

The critics, led by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the ACLU and People for the American Way, sounded constitutional alarms over alleged violations of church and state. Supporters denied these accusations and went on the offensive against the detractors. Prominent among the supporters was the Catholic League.

The same day that President Bush announced his initiative, January 29, the Catholic League stepped forward with a news release stating, "faith-based social service programs work." Indeed, we said, "The empirical evidence is so overwhelming that there really isn't anything to debate." That night, William Donohue debated Ron Barrier of American Atheists on the Fox News Channel show, "The Edge," hosted by Paula Zahn. He debated several other activists during the week.

The Catholic League drew attention to many faith-based programs, including a New York church-sponsored rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. No one doubts that it has worked wonders with troubled youth. The same can be said of Prison Fellowship Ministries, a program for hardened criminals that has a success record that no government program has ever matched.

The record also shows that the extensive church network that marks Michigan's Project Zero program has resulted in moving legions of people from welfare to work; the Putting Families First Foundation in South Carolina and the Faith and Families Project in Mississippi have also garnered an impressive record in dealing with this issue. Moreover, True Love Waits and Sex Respect are two abstinence-based programs that have delivered remarkable success rates in dealing with the problem of teenage illegitimacy. And the charitable services that Catholic, Protestant and Jewish agencies have long provided are acknowledged by nearly everyone for their effectiveness.

“Faith-based initiatives not only work better than their secular counterparts,” we told the press, “they do so at a fraction of the cost.” It is the spiritual dimension of these programs, we emphasized, that makes for success. But we stressed that in order for them to work, a new partnership between church and state must be instituted.

BIGOT BULLIES STUDENT

Not surprisingly, when an individual experiences anti-Catholic bigotry, we get a call. It often happens, however, that he or she may not want the Catholic League to pursue the matter, for fear of reprisal. We respect that choice and never go forward. But we do record the incident in our annual report on anti-Catholicism, and occasionally list it in *Catalyst* as well. In all cases, we protect the identity of the person. We recently got a report on an incident that our members need to know about.

A female student from a New York Catholic high school showed up at a public school on January 27 to take her SAT exam. A member of her school’s Catholic League chapter, she happened to be wearing her Catholic League T-shirt that day. When the person who was proctoring the exam saw “Catholic League” inscribed on the shirt, he told the teenager to put her jacket back on. He explicitly said the shirt was “racist” and “discriminated against the other students.” She was told, in front of all the students, that if she did not do as he said, she would be removed from the class. She complied.

We believe this would make a great lawsuit. But as we said, we respect the wishes of the offended party and will therefore not press the issue. Her parents were worried that

neighborhood youngsters might give their daughter a hard time; she lives across the street from the public school where the incident took place.

Nonetheless, we thought we'd share this with you. One final thought: how much do you want to bet that the bigot who bullied the girl believes in free speech for students who wear T-shirts with obscenities scrawled across them?

ELLEN "THE NUN"

The NBC show "Will and Grace" had a special guest February 15th. Someone thought it would be fun to have America's most well known lesbian, Ellen DeGeneres, play a nun. The nun said she was taken to the convent when she was three, thinking she was going to the zoo. "All I wanted to do is see the penguins. Ironical, isn't it?" DeGeneres said, dressed in an old-fashioned nun's habit.

She asked the gay male and his female friend, "What's sex with a man like?" and they both stumbled to answer. The nun had a business called, "What a Friend We Have in Cheesecake." When she won't return a car, Grace argued: "Why do you need a car? Can't you fly?" As Grace continued to complain, the nun responded, "Hey! Talk to the beads!"

The show concluded with DeGeneres' nun stating, "Big day for me. I'm not wearing a bra."

MAHER'S POLITICALLY CORRECT APOLOGY

Over the past few years, we have often commented on the anti-Catholic remarks of Bill Maher, host of the late-night ABC show, "Politically Incorrect." Whenever we ask the person in charge at ABC's Broadcast Standards and Practices for an apology, we get the usual, "well, Bill Maher offends lots of people" type of response. Maybe so, but he definitely has it out for Catholics more than anyone else. Moreover, as he recently proved, he is capable of granting an apology. But not to us.

In January, Maher quipped, "Dogs are like retarded children." After many complaints were fielded, he apologized; he admitted to crossing the line with this one.

On February 8, Maher crossed the line again. But there was no apology. That's because it was Catholics who caught the brunt of his brand of humor.

On that episode of "Politically Incorrect," Maher injected Christ into a discussion on AA. As usual, Maher led his guests on, keeping the subject of religion alive. Before long, comedian Richard Belzer opined that Mother Teresa "took tons of money from very shady people." She was then accused of never opening a clinic for the dying children of Calcutta, etc.

It is interesting that Maher apologized for offending the mentally retarded, but not Catholics. Now if he were, in fact, known for being politically incorrect, he would have offered Catholics the apology and snubbed the retarded.

In any event, you may want to write to the person who deals with viewer complaints. Write to Ms. Olivia Cohen-Cutler, Vice President, Broadcast Standards and Practices, ABC, 2040 Avenue

of the Stars, 5th floor, Century City, CA 90067.

MORE DISHONESTY OVER DIVERSITY

At bottom, diversity means allowing for differences. So when the New York State Assembly passed a bill that would require all employers to provide contraceptive health insurance coverage for its employees, Catholics wondered whether there would be enough diversity to go around that would allow for a religious conscience protection clause. To their dismay, they learned the answer was no.

Catholics got better news from the New York State Senate when it accepted such a clause. A compromise measure is now being sought.

William Donohue personally wrote to every member of the New York State Legislature arguing that Catholic health care facilities and health maintenance organizations should have the right to opt out of any mandated contraceptive and infertility coverage.

Donohue made the point that “just as it is wrong for a religious institution to strong-arm state agencies to bow to religious precepts, it is wrong for the state to coerce religious institutions to accept programs that effectively vitiate their *raison d’être*.”

The league was most upset with a remark by Sheldon Silver, the Assembly Speaker. He said that a religious conscience exemption would be “taking religious freedom a little too far.” Silver, we said, needs to explain to Roman Catholics

“why he thinks their rights are being pushed too far.” After all, we reasoned, “whose freedoms was he thinking of?”

We await a decision by the legislature.

“SAVING SILVERMAN” IS SHOCK SCHLOCK

Most reviewers agreed that “Saving Silverman” was one of the most vulgar movies to open in some time. What didn’t catch their eye were the Catholic-bashing elements.

When the film opened on February 9, it was described by reviewers in terms that were appropriately harsh: “there are a number of laugh-out-loud moments wedged in between the gay jokes, masturbation humour and poop pranks” (*Edmonton Sun*); “we see Darren undergoing surgery for butt-cheek implants and reacting to shocks from electric nipple clamps. Wayne applies a cattle prod to Judith, who’s holding J.D.’s fishnet-stocking-clad head underwater in a toilet bowl. And then there’s Erney defecating on a lawn” (*New York Post*); “It has much scatological humor” (*New York Times*); “PG-13 for crude and sexual humor, language, thematic material” (*USA Today*). The *Washington Post* said it best when it remarked, “‘Saving Silverman’ really stinks.”

Of particular interest to the Catholic League was the film’s take on nuns.

Here is what we told the media:

“Jason Biggs is the star of ‘Saving Silverman.’ He is mostly known for masturbating. To wit: a Lexis-Nexis search linking Biggs with masturbation turns up 76 hits; this is not

surprising given that he first became famous after masturbating into a hot apple pie in 'American Pie.' Now he's back at it again in 'Saving Silverman,' only this time he finds himself in an unusually sticky situation: his girl, Judith, warns him she'll 'take away (his) masturbation privileges' if he doesn't do what he's told.

"Now none of this would matter much to us if the movie didn't find it necessary to depict a 'long-lost school cheerleader crush...who, by the way, is training to be a nun.' True to form, the would-be nun is 'subjected to all manner of sexual embarrassment and displayed in various states of PG-13 acceptable undress.' Vulgar nun jokes are thrown in for good luck."

We then addressed the core issue for the Catholic League. "What got us was the way reviewers reacted to the movie's coarseness. Lou Lumenick, for example, told readers in the *New York Post* that the film was 'both misogynous and homophobic.' What he couldn't bring himself to do was register a complaint about the Catholic bashing. Neither could anyone else."

We await the day when movies that trash Catholics are greeted with the same outrage that currently greets films that trash gays.