

KENTUCKY AND NEW HAMPSHIRE TARGET CONFESSIONAL

Lawmakers in Kentucky and New Hampshire are debating whether to end the priest-penitent privilege as it currently exists in law.

Currently, both states respect the confidential nature of the confessional by allowing priests and other clergymen an exemption from mandated reporting laws. But the legislative bodies of Kentucky and New Hampshire may decide to end this exemption when it comes to communication relating to the neglect or abuse of a minor child. What gave rise to the bills was the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic League wasted no time charging that such a bill would cut to the core of church-state relations. The sanctity of the confessional, we maintained, is central to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Indeed, it is impossible to fathom how the sacrament could operate if the government is permitted to penetrate the privacy of the priest-penitent relationship. We admonished the legislators in both states to consider the impact such a bill would have on the religious liberty clause of the First Amendment, as well as the establishment clause.

We also said that the timing of the bill is suspect. If it had been established that in Kentucky, and elsewhere, Catholic priests had learned of cases of child sexual molestation in the confessional and did not report them, then at least the motivation behind the legislation would make sense. But no one is making this charge. And with good reason—the cases of child sexual abuse that have come to light have had nothing to do with information learned in the confessional.

We could not help but notice that in the state of Washington,

where a similar measure was debated, lawmakers there decided to respect the inviolable nature of the seal of the confessional. We also did not fail to notice that the person most responsible for pushing the bill in New Hampshire, Ann Coughlin, is also an active member of Voice of the Faithful.

Coughlin proved to be a master of spin when she said her actions are “a defense of a Catholic institution.” She even admitted she has no evidence whatsoever to show that priests in New Hampshire are being told in the confessional of crimes against children: “I can’t prove that ever happened. But I’m absolutely convinced that it has.”

The Catholic League will continue to fight against these bills wherever they surface.

D.C. JUDGE RIPS CHURCH

On January 30, D.C. Superior Court Judge Mildred M. Edwards convicted three Catholic homosexual activists for unlawful entry and then refused to sentence them. Her decision not to sentence them was based on her expressed sympathy for the activists.

The three were arrested on November 12 for an illegal protest they held in a D.C. hotel. They were protesting a decision made by a priest not to give them Holy Communion the day before at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The priest denied them Communion because he was aware that they belonged to Soulforce, a group that condemns the Church’s teachings on sexuality.

Judge Edwards told the activists that by denying them Communion, the priest had committed “tremendous violence”

against them. The judge, who claims to be Catholic, asked the protesters to forgive the Catholic Church and closed her remarks by saying, "Go in peace."

We told the press that Judge Edwards has a history of acting like an outlaw judge. More important, however, is the fact that the activists deliberately sought to receive Communion as an act of protest. Such behavior represents a serious abuse of power on the part of the laity that must be resisted.

"It would be interesting to know," we said, "how Edwards would react if her critics staged an illegal protest in her own chambers and then had a judge dismiss the charges after lecturing her about her judicial incompetence and theological ignorance."

NOT ALL SEXUAL ABUSERS ARE EQUAL

William A. Donohue

It was Jesus who said that "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Nothing nuanced about that. But do Americans believe this to be true? It depends on who the abuser is.

Only a small minority of the less than 1.5 percent of priests in the past 40 years who have been removed from the priesthood for sexual abuse are pedophiles; almost all of the guilty had sex with adolescents or adults, not children. And almost all of the guilty had sex with males (the figure in Boston is 95

percent—see the *Boston Globe*, February 7). The sexual abuse scandal has, justifiably, been the source of much criticism, both among Catholics and non-Catholics. Also justified is the acute moral outrage that has been reserved for those who would dare abuse a child. But what has gone largely unnoticed is the selective nature of this outrage.

If the source of the outrage were the harm done to minors, then it should not make one iota of difference who the abuser is. Regrettably, it does. What matters to many is whether the offender is a priest or someone else. This has nothing to do with holding priests to a higher standard: priests should be held to a higher standard because we rightly expect more from them. But there is something very disturbing going on when priests who harm kids are condemned while others are roundly defended and even heralded for doing so. Consider what happens when celebrities are implicated in sordid conduct involving kids.

- Pete Townshend is a rock guitarist idol and co-founder of The Who. He was arrested on January 14, 2003, for possession of child pornography. Model Jerry Hall, formerly married to Mick Jagger, immediately said she was “an avid supporter” of Townshend; rock sensation Elton John told reporters, “I love Pete and my thoughts are with him.”
- R&B star R. Kelly was arrested on January 20, 2003, on new charges of child pornography. But it had no impact on the sales of his new record. A music editor for a magazine explained, “It seems to imply that he can get away with it and people are comfortable with his behavior.”
- Rob Lowe is one of the stars of the TV series, “The West Wing.” Being arrested in

1988 for making a sexually explicit videotape of a 16-year-old girl did not hurt his career.

- Filmmaker Roman Polanski is being praised by many movie critics as a genius for his latest film, "The Pianist." Polanski was previously convicted of drugging a 13-year-old girl with pills and champagne and then raping her in his bathtub.
- When rock star Gary Glitter was spending time in jail in 1999 for downloading more than 4,000 images of children as young as 2 involved in sexual acts, the Pepsi Center in Denver was still playing his most famous song after every goal scored by the local hockey team.
- When comedian Paula Poundstone went back to work after pleading no contest to charges of child molestation, she told a packed house in New Jersey, "This is my first night performing since I've been a criminal." The *Bergon Record* said, "The audience roared."
- Pee Wee Herman was recently arrested for possession of child pornography; the cops also found 100,000 items of gay porn in his house. "Friends" star Courteney Cox and husband David Arquette rushed to his defense; Arquette dubbed Herman "a great guy."
- When Michael Jackson was the target of child molestation charges in 1993, Elizabeth Taylor said she believed "100 percent in

Michael's integrity"; Jackson settled out of court for millions. After Jackson more recently admitted that he likes to sleep with boys, Taylor, in a general discussion of the famed singer, told Larry King "I love him." When asked why, she said, "We have such similar backgrounds."

There you have it. What a sizable segment of the public seems to be saying is that we ought to be able to forgive and forget when celebrities abuse children, but we need zero tolerance when priests do it. It's not the kids that matter—it's who the abuser is.

There's something else going on here as well. The New York-Hollywood axis of smut, and those who support it, want the Catholic Church to fail. What it comes down to is that these people do not want to be told that their promiscuous lifestyle is sinful.

Sadly, this represents the Clintonization of our culture. In other words, shamelessness has been mainstreamed. Because it is nothing if not shameless that the same men and women who rush to put a medal around the neck of celebrities for sexually abusing children rush just as fast to put a millstone around the neck of priests who do so.

Daniel L. Dreisbach's Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of

Separation Between Church and State

By Joseph A. P. De Feo

Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote, “A phrase begins life as a literary expression; its felicity leads to its lazy repetition; and repetition soon establishes it as a legal formula, indiscriminatingly used to express different and sometimes contradictory ideas.” The foregoing lines represent an apt condensation of Professor Daniel L. Dreisbach’s thesis in his book *Thomas Jefferson and the Separation between Church and State*. This slim volume consists of a relatively short essay on Jefferson’s “wall of separation” metaphor, some primary sources, and a wealth of notes. Although Dreisbach calls the work merely a “sourcebook”—and it is an excellent one—it is hard for the reader to glance over the bare facts of the case without sincere and grave doubts about both the legitimacy and the desirability of the concept of a “wall of separation.”

Unlike many other recent treatments of church-state relations, Dreisbach’s study concentrates on the life of a metaphor—the “wall of separation between church and state”—and how it compares to the actual Constitutional law it is meant to represent. Thomas Jefferson used the phrase in 1802 in his response to the Danbury Baptist Association, which had written to the president to congratulate him on his electoral victory. He wrote, “...I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”

Dreisbach makes the persuasive case that Jefferson wrote his famous letter to “hurl a brick” at his Federalist opponents,

who had branded him an atheist in the bitter election of 1800; his pious tone and offer of prayer were meant to silence his foes: "I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessing of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you for yourselves and your religious association, assurances of my high respect and esteem."

Jefferson wrote also to appease some of his supporters—the Danbury Baptists, who voted Democratic-Republican and suffered under harsh regulation from the Congregationalist (and mostly Federalist) establishment in Connecticut. Connecticut in the early 19th century, like many states, had an established church. The state was firmly Congregational, with ministers on state salaries; dissenting religious groups, such as the Baptists, usually paid for the support of the established church, and did not enjoy the same privileges as Congregational ministers (e.g., for a time they could not even perform legal marriage ceremonies). This was perfectly legal, because the Constitution only prohibited the federal government from passing laws "respecting an establishment of religion"; and the Bill of Rights provides, through the tenth amendment, that, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." The power to establish a state religion, then, though denied to the United States, was reserved to the individual states.

Jefferson's acknowledgement of this federalist structure is evident in his conduct in office: he refused to proclaim federal days of prayer or fasting while president, breaking with the tradition of his predecessors; on the other hand, he drafted resolutions in support of such days of prayer while in the Virginia House of Burgesses and as governor of Virginia. Jefferson, Dreisbach shows, held a jurisdictional view of the First Amendment.

It is clear from Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists

that he did hope in time to “see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights...”; he here referred to the eventual disestablishment of the various churches in the states, to match the federal government. But he would never have considered that the First Amendment could be used to do this, because he was committed both to federalism and to limited central government; he would have thought it a transgression for the federal government to stomp on the states’ sovereignty.

Of course, a belief in disestablishment does not entail hostility to religion in government. Jefferson frequently showed his belief that the federal government is permitted to perform acts of hospitality toward religion without threatening the First Amendment. Not only did he ask listeners to join him in prayer in his second inaugural address; Dreisbach notes that he “personally encouraged and symbolically supported religion by attending public church services in the Capitol,” in January of 1802 and with some frequency thereafter. He also negotiated a treaty with the Kaskaskia Indians designating federal moneys to pay for the construction of a Catholic church and the salary of a Catholic priest. His notion of a “law respecting the establishment of religion” was obviously more robust than the stark image of the “wall of separation.”

Despite Jefferson’s nuanced thought on the relationship between church and state, jurists have seized on one phrase in his letter, presenting a caricature of Jefferson’s views to promote their secularization of the U.S. government—which Dreisbach suggests Jefferson might have found objectionable.

The metaphor is not truly analogous to the Constitutional arrangement of church and state. The wall of separation presupposes that government and religion are wholly distinct and can be divided as though by a physical structure. A strict wall would eliminate practices that even supporters of strict

separation now take for granted: for instance, military chaplains and tax exemptions for religious organizations. And it would be outrageous to ask legislators to leave their religion at home—not to mention harmful; the Bible is not *Mein Kampf*, although the ACLU and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State might sooner allow the latter than the former to be read in Congress. The wall also tends to undermine the proper idea of freedom of religion, which should be like freedom of the press: the free press is protected from government interference. Banning the press from the public square would be viewed as an outrage; not so with religion.

What is more puzzling than the continual historical distortion of Jefferson's views is the fact that they matter at all in this debate. Jefferson's metaphor has become a canonized gloss on the First Amendment, despite the man's noticeable absence from this country during both the Constitutional Convention and the debate on the Bill of Rights during the First Federal Congress (he was the U.S. Minister to France); not to mention the fact that Jefferson was never on the Supreme Court. And there is no evidence that the phrase to which so much attention is now paid, was ever again uttered or written by Jefferson after he penned it in 1802.

Dreisbach attributes the phrase's continuing power partly to the unique advantages of metaphor in legal analysis. Metaphors liven up legal language, provide concrete images of the abstract, and engage the reader, causing him to make comparisons between the metaphor and that which it represents; all of which make the concept more memorable.

But this does not fully explain the wide currency of Jefferson's wall. To tell the whole story, one would have to take into account societal developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (namely, the increasing numbers of Catholic immigrants and the matching waves of nativist sentiment) as well as the biographies and psychologies of key proponents of the wall (for example, Justice Hugo L. Black's

membership in the Ku Klux Klan and abiding anti-Catholicism). Dreisbach makes only passing mention of these factors, since he has limited the structure of his work to that of a legal sourcebook; nonetheless, any picture of the metaphor's life-span without these details lacks depth.

A major shortcoming of the use of metaphor in legal analysis is that a metaphor, in equating two distinct objects, can easily lend itself to faulty comparisons. For instance, a wall restricts parties on both sides; but the First Amendment was meant to restrict only the federal government. When Justice Hugo Black in his decision in the 1947 *Everson v. Board of Education* case called Jefferson's wall the definitive interpretation of the First Amendment, he capitalized on the image, declaring, "That wall must be kept high and impregnable." This is an even greater broadening of the First Amendment's scope. Dreisbach notes that some have called a high and impregnable wall a "wall of spite," and that good neighbors would prefer a low New England stone wall, at which neighbors can meet and speak. An amicus brief filed in *Everson* warned against turning the wall of separation into an iron curtain. Others have suggested the images of a wall with doors or guarded gaps, like the Great Wall of China; a barbed wire fence; and even a prison wall. The fact that all of these conceptions of the wall with their conflicting legal corollaries can be (and are) drawn from Jefferson's wall demonstrates how problematic the metaphor is.

Different readings of the wall metaphor result in an inconsistent array of decisions dealing with church and state: confusion over school vouchers, prayer or crèches in public schools, the tune "God Bless America," the words "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, etc. More often than not, the metaphor's ambiguity has made it an easy cudgel to be used by radical secularists and other unprincipled partisans to promote their political agendas. It should be unsurprising that then-Justice Rehnquist in 1985 said of the wall of

separation: “[It] is a metaphor based on bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned.”

Professor Dreisbach takes great pains to present an impartial study. He even concludes with an even-handed presentation of arguments for and against the “wall of separation.” Despite his mostly descriptive tenor, the facts of the matter tend to highlight what is prescriptive: nothing short of a serious reconsideration of the metaphor as a condensation of Constitutional law.

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BUSH CHAMPIONS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush made the case that religious organizations ought to be allowed to participate in federal efforts aimed at combating drug abuse. Specifically, President Bush proposed that Congress provide vouchers to addicts that could be used to pay for services in any drug treatment center they choose, including those with a religious orientation.

Our immediate comment was one of praise: “President Bush has shown once again that he does not suffer from the kind of religiophobia that afflicts so many of his colleagues in Washington. Those who have a phobia against the public presence of religion should themselves be awarded vouchers to rid themselves of this terrible affliction. It would be money well spent.”

What Bush seeks to do is supported by excellent social science data. We know from the work of Harvard economist Richard Freeman that there is an inverse relationship between churchgoing and deviancy. When his study was replicated many years later by Byron Johnson and David B. Larson, they found that urban black youth were less likely to commit to drugs and delinquency if they were churchgoers. And according to Princeton University professor John DiIulio (who first ran the faith-based programs in the Bush administration), there are more than a dozen studies that confirm this relationship.

In a rational world, Bush's proposal would be welcomed by those concerned about urban problems. Regrettably, many of these same people are more concerned about marginalizing the public role of religion than they are in helping the downtrodden.

"Unfortunately," we said in a news release, "when it comes to giving people choices that include religious as well as secular approaches, the religiophobes line up single file against school vouchers, faith-based initiatives and the like. Indeed, the only choice they seem to like is the one where the mere exercise of a given choice inexorably results in the loss of someone else's life."

The enemies of religious freedom wasted no time blasting President Bush for his State of the Union address. And we wasted no time answering them.

William Donohue put the issue in perspective: "Religious liberty is meaningless unless it can be publicly expressed. It is not persuasive to say that religion can be expressed in houses of worship, but no place else, and still maintain fidelity to religious liberty. To take another example, if we banned all displays of artistic expression in public—from paintings to music—and relegated them to museums and concert halls, everyone would declare that such a decision bristled with hostility to the arts. That is why it makes sense to see the enemies of the public expression of religion as the

enemies of religious liberty, per se.”

It is amazing that the enemies of religious liberty do not want to give drug addicts a voucher that could be used for treatment in either a secular or religious organization. Thus do they show their fear of change and animus to inclusion. It is sad to note that they would deny addicts a right to choose by excluding them from programs available to the rich.

Who are these groups? Donohue spelled them out: “The National Organization for Women, People for the American Way, the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State—all of them rang their constitutional bells over a proposal that would permit an addict the right to choose a priest, minister, rabbi or imam for help (God forbid that an atheist with an M.S.W. might be passed up!). It should also be mentioned that the Interfaith Alliance, a motley crew of left-wingers, was critical of the plan. But at least they had guts: the National Council of Churches had nothing to say about Bush’s initiative, though it did find time to blast him on Iraq.”

It is so plainly bogus for this crowd to say that one of the reasons why they are opposed to Bush’s plan is because religious social programs “lack accountability.” What they mean is that big brother (their real deity) can’t police them the way he can a government monopoly.

NARAL WELCOMES DEMOCRATS AND KISSLING

On January 21, the six Democratic contenders for the presidency appeared at a NARAL Pro-Choice America event celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s

decision in Roe v. Wade.

The following day, the actual anniversary date of the abortion ruling, NARAL president Kate Michelman and Planned Parenthood president Gloria Feldt held a press conference in Washington on abortion rights. One of the participating organizations at the press conference was Catholics for a Free Choice, headed by Frances Kissling.

We told media that one of the founders of NARAL was Dr. Bernard Nathanson. He converted a number of years ago to the pro-life side and even became a Catholic. Nathanson has admitted in great detail the anti-Catholic roots of NARAL: lying about the Church, fabricating data and demonizing Catholicism were an integral part of NARAL's strategy. Over the years NARAL may have become more careful about expressing its hostility to the Catholic Church, but it is still not to be trusted. Be that as it may, one person who continues to exercise no such caution is Kissling.

Kissling has not shied away from making her anti-Catholicism public. Indeed, she wears it proudly on her sleeve. That is why so many Catholics are outraged by the refusal of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to drop Kissling's group as a link on its website.

Our statement to the media left no doubts about our resolve in dealing with this issue: "There can be no more room for both Catholics and anti-Catholics in the Democratic party than there can be for both African Americans and white supremacists. That is why the Catholic League will not let go of this issue: the DNC must stop its association with anti-Catholicism and Democratic aspirants to the presidency must address this issue."

This is an unseemly coalition—Democratic candidates for the presidency joining with the advocates of partial-birth abortion and anti-Catholicism. We look for some brave voices in the media to start asking these men some really tough

questions about this issue. The public has a right to know their thoughts on the Kissling connection and no one has a right to know more than Catholics.

JIMMY BRESLIN SEEKS TO MALIGN CATHOLIC LEAGUE

Outside the New York area, he is not well known. But few New Yorkers don't know who Jimmy Breslin is. He is generally regarded as New York's premier saloon journalist; he now writes for *Newsday*, a Long Island newspaper. He is also roaring mad at the Catholic Church and not just because of the scandal: he's angry because the Church doesn't institute the left-wing's agenda on sexuality.

In any event, he recently called William Donohue. The following news release explains what happened. We are awaiting Breslin's column blasting the league. Here's how Donohue preempted him:

"Jimmy Breslin called this morning around 9:30 a.m. asking to see the office of the Catholic League. He said he wanted to know how many members we have and who funds the league. I told him he could check out our website and consult the article by Winnie Hu in the New York Times that covered everything he needed to know. When I told him we had thousands of members in the New York area, it came as no surprise to learn that he never met one of them; league members are practicing Catholics.

"Less than a minute into the conversation, Breslin exploded. Screaming at the top of his lungs, he charged I was no

different than Placa; the reference was to Msgr. Alan Placa, the Rockville Centre priest who has been implicated in the sexual abuse scandal.

“For many years now, I have been called by scores of journalists for interviews and have unfailingly honored them. But never has any of them, or anyone else, ever put me in the same category with a man who has had three accusations of sexual abuse made against him by adolescent boys. Breslin is the only person ever to have made such a wild accusation.

“Shortly after Breslin’s outburst, I called *Newsday* editor Anthony Marro. I told him that Breslin would not be welcome in my office because it was obvious that the man was utterly incapable of rendering an objective account. Marro was cordial as usual.

“The Catholic League is open to fair criticism. But what we are not open to is someone whose disdain for all things Catholic has distorted his vision of reality. We only deal with journalists who demonstrate professionalism and sobriety of thought. Breslin is not one of them.”

NY GAY POL PROMOTES CATHOLIC BASHING

In January, Thomas Duane, a gay state senator from New York, declared that all Catholic priests should be barred from leading a prayer in the legislature.

Duane became angry when Albany Bishop Howard Hubbard delivered the legislative session’s opening prayer on January 8. Duane sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno demanding

that no priest should be allowed to pray in the Senate. He cited the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church as justification for his request.

We found it ironic that just a few weeks before, Duane led the New York State legislature in passing a bill outlawing discrimination against homosexuals in the state. But apparently Duane's interest in combating discrimination ends at the Church door: when it comes to Catholic priests, he is all in favor of discrimination.

We told the press that it is wrong to think that this bigoted move by Duane was an anomaly. In April 2002, he objected to the appointment of a Catholic priest as a CUNY trustee simply because he was a Catholic priest.

William Donohue spoke for the Catholic League when he offered the following remarks to the media: "Duane is lucky that his counterpart—anti-gays—are not members of the New York State legislature. Because if there were anti-gays in the legislature, they might demand that Duane be barred from participation in legislative sessions because of his homosexuality. They could cite—following Duane's bigoted rationale—the homosexual contribution to AIDS and other preventable diseases as justification."

Another disturbing aspect to this issue is the fact that Duane knew that his liberal, ever-tolerant, supremely inclusive, drunk-with-diversity constituency in Manhattan would not punish him at the polls for being anti-Catholic.

Donohue and Duane clashed on talk radio in New York City. On the WABC show, "Curtis and Kuby," Duane blamed Catholic bishops for holding up a mandatory sexual abuse reporting bill that would cover all adults. But Donohue was able to demonstrate that it was the New York Civil Liberties Union and Family Planning Advocates, the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood—not Catholic bishops—who were responsible for tying

things up.

It is striking that Duane, who is HIV positive, would seek to discriminate against all priests for a problem (the sexual abuse scandal) that has been brought about largely by gays. In any event, Duane began to do some quick backpedaling once he got publicly stung by the Catholic League.

A STUDY IN RELIGIOUS PROFILING

On February 10, a lawyer with three suits against the Albany Diocese asked the presiding judge to recuse himself because he is a practicing Catholic. Attorney John Aretakis made the request of State Supreme Court Justice Joseph Teresi, but the judge refused. When Aretakis commented that Teresi often goes to weekday Mass and is a “deeply religious and spiritual person with a great deal of faith in his Catholic Church,” Teresi said this was pure “hyperbole”; he scoffed at the “deeply religious” claim.

Our position was spelled out in the following release to the news media:

“If a judge has a demonstrated inability to render a fair judgment on a particular case—for whatever reason—then he must recuse himself. But to simply hurl a charge of bias against someone because he attends a local house of worship not only fails to meet this test, it itself smacks of bigotry. The Constitution bars any religious test for holding public office, and the contra should hold as well: it is equally unacceptable to bar someone on the basis of religious profiling.

“Nothing Judge Teresi has said or done merits his recusal. The same, however, cannot be said of attorney Aretakis. He should remove himself from this case with dispatch. But before he does, perhaps he can share with the public his rather amazing talent for measuring the depth of someone’s religious faith.”

As bad as attorney Aretakis was, the major newspaper in Albany, the Times Union, was worse. Like Aretakis, it also called for Judge Teresi to recuse himself. But unlike Aretakis, it didn’t have the guts to cite the judge’s practicing Catholic status. Instead, it trotted out the old canard about an overly-aggressive judge setting tight strictures on the jury and all parties to the lawsuit.

We’d rather not have to deal with bigots. But if we must, give us an honest one to work with over a dishonest one. We sent a letter to the Times Union essentially accusing it of cowardice.

MUMMERS PARADE DROPS OFFENSIVE SKIT

The Mummers Parade on New Year’s Day is a Philadelphia tradition. Because of poor weather, this year’s parade was moved to January 4. What made it really unique, though, was the news that this year’s march would include an anti-Catholic skit. But after much protest the offensive skit was dropped. Public complaints were made by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the Diocese of Camden (a south Jersey diocese close to the city) and the Catholic League.

This year’s Mummers Parade was to include a “parody” of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. To be performed

by the Slick Duck Comic Brigade, it was supposed to feature men dressed as priests and young men dressed as altar boys; cops were to be shown chasing after the priests. The parade, it should be noted, is funded by the City of Philadelphia.

The Catholic League took the position that the skit was really an attack on gay priests. This angered some of our critics who for political reasons would prefer not to make any connection between the sexual abuse scandal and homosexuality. "To mock gay priests in a major parade in a prominent city is disgraceful," commented William Donohue. "That the government is hosting this assault on homosexual priests is even worse," he added.

We did not find it persuasive to say, as the sponsor of the Slick Duck's entry announced, that "As far as the parade goes, nothing is irreverent." We pointed out that the Deputy Recreation Commissioner of the parade was on record saying that no "blackface" would be allowed to march. "That's because the City of Philadelphia is infinitely more interested in not offending the sensibilities of African Americans than it is gay priests," Donohue said. "In short," he opined, "the City has drawn a line that racists may not cross, but anti-Catholic and anti-gay bigots are welcome to do so."

In an interesting turn of events, WPHL, the station that was to televise the parade, announced in advance that it would not show this expression of Catholic bashing. The general manager of the station, Leslie Glenn, rightly dubbed this display "disgusting."

The Catholic League publicly commended Ms. Glenn for making this call. But we respectfully disagreed with her judgment nonetheless: Channel 17, we urged, should air this display of bigotry and let all Philadelphians know what the Slick Ducks are made of and what both the Mummers and the City of Philadelphia are willing to tolerate. That way men and women of common decency would be able to confront the bigots in

their midst.

In the end, the parade was performed without incident. The Slick Ducks said they were never really going to perform their spoof. Mayoral candidate Sam Katz had it just right when he declared: "It was a sick proposal and a sick joke. Was it really a joke or something they decided to bag when they got so much pressure?" The evidence suggests the latter interpretation is right and that is why we were delighted to add to the pressure.