

JEWISH LEADERS BLAST GOOD FRIDAY PRAYER

Pope Benedict XVI heard a torrent of criticism following the release of the revision of the Latin Good Friday prayer for the Jews. The Holy Father had altered the prayer in reaction to complaints from some Jewish leaders who objected to its former reference to Jews' "blindness." The old prayer also asked God to "remove the veil from their [the Jews'] hearts." However, though the pope rewrote the prayer, the new version was met with ire by people still angry that it asks God for a conversion of all to accept Jesus as the Savior of mankind.

Abe Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League, intoned, "we are deeply troubled and disappointed that the framework and intention to petition God for Jews to accept Jesus as Lord was kept intact." Foxman went on to hold himself out as an expert in Catholic theology, saying the revised prayer "is a major departure from the teachings and actions of Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and numerous authoritative Catholic documents, including *Nostra Aetate*."

Others also inserted themselves into an internal Church matter. Rabbi David Rosen, head of the American Jewish Committee and chair of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (which includes B'nai Brith, the World Jewish Congress, and many other organizations), opined: "This new version for the Latin rite appears to be a regression from the path advanced by the declaration of the second Vatican Council. We urge the Catholic Church to deepen its exploration of the full implications of *Nostra Aetate*'s affirmation of the eternal validity of God's Divine Covenant with the Jewish People."

Sir Sigmund Sternberg, a Jewish papal knight and founder of a British interfaith organization called Three Faiths Forum,

offered this reprimand to the Vatican: "The Second Vatican Council said we should be nice to the Jews." How exactly praying for Jews constitutes not being "nice," Sternberg didn't say. Further, in an editorial rife with factual errors, prominent Jewish newspaper the *Forward* charged that Pope Benedict XVI undid the good interfaith work accomplished by popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II. The paper even claimed: "Christian missionizing [i.e., prayer]...demeans Judaism and ultimately threatens Jewish security."

The United Kingdom's Council of Christians and Jews also lectured the Vatican on Catholic teaching, claiming that the new prayer "appears to go against the grain of all that the Church has taught for the last 50 years." The chief rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segnie, also expressed displeasure with the new prayer, as did Rabbi Guiseppe Laras, chairman of the Italian Rabbinical Assembly. Rabbi Laras even warned, "the prayer will eventually strengthen the positions of those Jewish environments that oppose the dialogue with the Catholic Church."

An international coalition of Conservative rabbis, also called the Rabbinical Assembly, took a stance on the matter. They drafted a statement charging that the new Catholic prayer would "cast a harsh shadow over the spirit of mutual respect and collaboration that has marked these past four decades." After rethinking their words, however, the rabbis struck that line and adopted another resolution stating that they were "dismayed and deeply disturbed" by the prayer.

Why anyone should be surprised that Catholics continue to pray that all may worship Jesus is baffling. The Church's belief in Jesus as the Savior of all mankind has never wavered, despite what some of these critics may claim. As Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Vatican's relations with the Jews, told reporters, "We think that reasonably this prayer cannot be an obstacle to dialogue because it reflects the faith of the Church and, furthermore, Jews have prayers in their liturgical

texts that we Catholics don't like. I must say that I don't understand why Jews cannot accept that we can make use of our freedom to formulate our prayers."

It appears that some Jewish leaders agree with the cardinal. Rabbi Jacob Neusner (whose analysis of Jesus' life played a significant role in Pope Benedict XVI's book *Jesus of Nazareth*) spoke to the press when the whole controversy began. Rabbi Neusner explained he wasn't concerned about the Catholic prayer, adding "I've pointed out that the synagogue liturgy has an equivalent prayer which we say three times a day, not just once a year." The rabbi was referring to the prayer said by Jewish men thanking God for not making them gentiles.

Hillel Halkin, a translator of Jewish literature and contributing editor of the *New York Sun*, was perplexed as to why some Jews are outraged. He wrote, "Frankly, I don't see how it's possible to be a believing Christian without hoping that the Jews will one day accept Jesus." Halkin also argued that one Jewish High Holy Day prayer is "a prayer for Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus to abandon their religions and accept the Torah of Israel," and wondered how Jews would respond if Christians were to request it be abandoned.

As Cardinal Kasper has made it clear, by affirming that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all mankind, the Church is giving "witness to our faith." The goal of the revised prayer is certainly not to disparage Jews. It must be hoped that when this controversy dies down, the excellent relations between Catholic and Jewish leaders can once again resume. Interfaith dialogue can continue without sacrificing deeply held beliefs or ordering others to alter theirs.

NUDITY, NUNS AND EQUINOX GYMS: JUST EDGY ENOUGH

Equinox fitness clubs rolled into 2008 with a new marketing campaign, displaying ads in its gyms and in publications like *Boston Magazine* and *New York Magazine*. The “Happily ever” campaign features an ad with attractive young women, all dressed as nuns in habit, sketching a naked man; each of the nuns are fixated on his genitals.

The ad agency, Fallon Worldwide, believed that running these edgy ads were an important marketing tool. It was speculated that Fallon used the ads in order to make a splash financially, due to its past financial difficulty.

Twenty years ago Fallon lost \$22 million when major U.S. corporations stopped doing business with the company: an ugly series of racist and sexist incidents involving senior Fallon employees set off the firestorm. Given their recent struggles and tainted past, it is a wonder that Equinox chose such an unreliable agency.

While this ad was not the most offensive ad the Catholic League had ever seen, we recognized that it was completely unnecessary and juvenile. The need to rip off Catholic imagery in a sophomoric soft-porn ad was, and always will be, inexcusable.

We wondered what Equinox would have done had Fallon replaced the nuns with Islamic women covered with veils. They would have probably agreed that it was too edgy.

Following our news release on the ad, Fallon’s global communications director, Rosemary Abendroth, defended the ad by saying, “We’re not saying they’re nuns. They are all models who are dressed in a certain way. It isn’t meant to be a religious commentary.” Abendroth concluded, “For those who

jumped to the conclusion they were nuns, they should be corrected.”

Did Ms. Abendroth expect us to buy Fallon’s claim that there was no intent of religious commentary? This statement was a clear jab at the intelligence of Catholics. It also showed that Fallon Worldwide believed it could pull the wool over the eyes of Catholics who were offended. Unfortunately for them, the Catholic League saw right through it.

SECULARISTS FREAK OVER RELIGION

An Alabama school shows an inspiring movie about a football team that beat the odds because of the players’ religious convictions. A divorced woman sends her son to a Catholic school in Kentucky. And a congressman from Virginia proposes a resolution proclaiming American Religious History Week. So what? That’s what we thought. Until, that is, we read how all three are being challenged.

The movie “Facing the Giants” tells the story of a Southern football coach who inspires his players to turn around their losing season by giving “your best to God.” The film, which cost only \$100,000 to produce, is so popular that it has grossed more than \$10 million. Everyone seems to have loved it, save for a handful of radical secularists. Enter the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The Tuscaloosa City Schools system was forced to suspend showing the movie because of its Christian content.

When a Kentucky couple got divorced, the mother wanted her son to continue his education in a Catholic school, but the father

objected. The judge ruled in favor of the mother. But now the boy is slated to attend a Catholic high school next year and the father is suing on the grounds that the school will indoctrinate his son with religious convictions he does not share; the father is an atheist.

Rep. Randy Forbes recently filed a nonbinding resolution that would support a designated week each May “for the appreciation of and education on America’s history of religious faith.” Americans United jumped in accusing the congressman of “meddling in religious issues.” The resolution’s outcome is uncertain.

All three issues show the mean-spiritedness of radical secularists. Nothing frightens them more than religion, and they will use every tactic in the book they can to blunt it. It is they who are truly frightening.^a

MOCKING OUR FAITH ISN'T FUNNY

If anyone wants proof of the ubiquity of anti-Catholicism, let him consider what happened recently at the State University of New York’s Albany campus.

A motivational speaker was invited by the university’s Division of Finance and Business to give an address. In the course of his remarks, the speaker made many snide references to his Catholic upbringing, and even went so far as to ridicule the Eucharist.

Bill Donohue wrote to a school official requesting that this person never be invited back to the campus. “Surely there are good motivational speakers in the Albany area who can fire up a crowd without resorting to cheap shots at the Catholic

faith," Donohue wrote. He also noted that the person in charge of the Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action was apprised of this incident and was not pleased with what happened.

It is our hope that this speaker is never invited back.

IRAQI CHRISTIANS GARNER DONOHUE'S SUPPORT

An important religious group, Christian Solidarity International (CSI), recently established a new group, Coalition to Save Iraqi Christians. CSI Chairman and CEO Dr. John Eibner contacted Dr. Donohue and asked him to join the new organization's board of advisors. Donohue was happy to say yes.

CSI is billed as "a Christian human rights organization for religious liberty helping victims of religious repression, victimized children and victims of disaster." Dr. Eibner stresses that the U.S. government should "work towards developing a secure homeland province for religious minorities and should facilitate the voluntary return and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons following effective security measures."

Saving Iraqi Christians is a noble cause that should command the attention of all Christians. And given the support that American Iraqi Catholics gave to our boycott of the Miller Brewing Company last fall, Donohue felt obliged to return the favor and lend his support to CSI's latest venture.

We thought you would like to know about this development.

WERE WE RESPONSIBLE?

Last fall we blasted comedian Kathy Griffin for the obscene and bigoted remark she made at the Emmys. And as everyone knows, we went after the ABC show “The View,” big time last year. We mention this because Griffin was recently told that her invitation to appear on “The View” was cancelled. The reason given was considered tongue-in-check by everyone: the show’s producer said it was because Griffin was “too mean” to Barbara Walters the last time she was on the show.

Makes us wonder: Were we responsible for nixing her? We hope so.