

CELEBRITY CRUISES STIFFS CATHOLICS

Recently we learned that Celebrity Cruises announced that at the beginning of this year it would no longer have priests on board to celebrate daily and Sunday Masses. We immediately followed up by questioning the cruise line about its new policy. Celebrity replied to our inquiry by saying, "Out of respect for our guests of all religious faiths, Celebrity has chosen to align the religious services provided for Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Interdenominational faiths effective January 4, 2010." It added that religious services would be provided for "the major High Holy Holidays of each respective faith."

What this statement failed to note is the reason for the new policy. The following is an excerpt from a letter Celebrity sent to Catholic priests affected by the change in policy: "While we do meet the needs of many guests onboard by supplying a priest, we have recently encountered a great deal of negative feedback pertaining to the 'selective' support of one particular religion/faith. After many internal discussions, external research, and marketing investigations, Celebrity Cruises will only place Roman Catholic Priests on sailings that take place over the Easter and Christmas holiday."

In other words, because some anti-Catholics objected to daily Mass onboard the ship, Celebrity Cruises threw the priests—and the lay Catholic men and women with them—overboard. Instead of standing on principle and telling those generating the "negative feedback" that no one is forced to attend Mass, and that tolerance demands respect for religious freedom, officials at Celebrity Cruises decided to yield to the bigots.

Celebrity spokeswoman Liz Jakeway defended the new policy by

distorting the truth of what actually occurred. She said that the new policy is “built around our guests’ feedback and their suggestion that we ‘level the playing field.’” There was feedback alright, but it was hardly amicable. She failed to mention that Celebrity let bigotry—not parity—drive its new policy.

Similarly, one would never have known the truth of what happened by reading Cathy Lynn Grossman’s column in the January 26 *USA Today*. She made it sound as if Catholics had been cut a deal by Celebrity at the expense of others. She reported that some “were annoyed that Catholic clergy had ever been favored over other faiths that have daily or weekly prayers.” But there was no favoritism: there is a profound difference between non-Catholic clergy not requesting daily religious services and their being denied by Celebrity.

If Celebrity and its cheering section can’t defend the new policy on principle, then it should at least not play fast and loose with the facts. We understand the need for corporate damage control, but there is no place for dishonesty. We advised all Catholics to shop around the next time they plan on taking a cruise, but not to waste their time checking out Celebrity Cruises.

PROP 8 CHALLENGE PUTS RELIGION ON TRIAL

The voters in 30 states who have taken up the issue of gay marriage have voted 30-0 to affirm marriage as a union between a man and a woman; Proposition 8 did exactly that in California. Attorneys David Boies and Theodore B. Olsen,

however, have been contesting this issue in a San Francisco court.

On January 20, the judge allowed Boies and Olsen to submit e-mails they obtained between the director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the bishops. Allowing such communication in a trial is unusual enough, but the purpose was even more invidious: to show that Catholics played a major role in passing Prop 8. The lawyers did the same thing to Mormons, offering more e-mail "proof" of their involvement.

Now some would reply that it should not matter what the adherents of any religion say about public policy issues. After all, the First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion and freedom of speech. Unfortunately, this misses the point the lawyers hope to make.

Their goal is not to contest the First Amendment rights of Catholics and others—their goal is to put religion on trial. What they are saying is that religious-based reasons for rejecting gay marriage are irrational, and thus do not meet the test of promoting a legitimate state interest. That is why they have trotted out professors like Gary Segura of Stanford and George Chauncey of Yale to testify to the irrationality of the pro-Prop 8 side. Chauncey was even given the opportunity to read from a Vatican document that rejects homosexual marriage.

Society cannot exist without families; families cannot exist without reproduction; reproduction cannot exist without a sexual union between a man and a woman; *and every society in the history of the world* has created an institution called marriage to provide for this end. But what took place in the courtroom smacked of an animus toward religion.

The lawyers for the anti-Prop 8 side touted Segura's testimony that religious groups which supported Prop 8 constituted 34 percent of the nation's population, while only 2 percent of

religions opposed it. A comment that was grossly misleading.

For starters, far more than 2 percent of religions support gay marriage: Buddhism has no official position but it is well known that Buddhists in California worked against Prop 8; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America supports gay marriage, just so long as the term “marriage” isn’t used; the Episcopal Church also opposes all state and federal bans on gay marriage, therefore putting it on the side of the anti-Prop 8 forces; Hinduism has no official position on gay marriage, though those who follow Hindu texts like the Kama Sutra are fine with it; Reform and Reconstructionist strands of Judaism support gay marriage; the Presbyterian Church (USA) is similar to the Evangelical Lutherans in supporting gay marriage just so long as “marriage” is not used; Unitarian Universalist Association is pro-gay marriage; the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is pro-gay marriage; the United Church of Christ also supports gay marriage.

Second, over 100 faith-based organizations, listed on the website of Vote NO on Prop 8, support gay marriage and worked hard to defeat Prop 8.

Third, though there are many religions opposed to gay marriage, there is nothing analogous to the coordinated effort of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable—it enlists the aid of all the aforementioned religions, and even includes Quakers, Baptists, Eastern Orthodox and Methodist members.

In short, if the lawyers wanted to drag religion into the trial, they should have an honest debate and not rely on homosexual activists and academics for help.

A few days after Segura’s testimony, Boies served up a wild pitch. He pointed out that Catholicism teaches that homosexual acts are a “serious depravity,” and that the Southern Baptist Convention labels them an “abomination.” He was asking the presiding judge to connect the dots between the identification

of sinful acts and the sanctioning of incivility against the sinners.

The argument failed miserably. As the Church has long noted, there is a huge difference between condemning sinful behavior and condemning those who engage in it. It is even more preposterous to sanction incivility against sinners by the self-righteous.

When African Americans were seeking equal rights, they never sought to upend the most fundamental social institutions in society, namely marriage and family. Nor did they ever denigrate world religions. Instead, people like Martin Luther King, himself a minister, spoke respectfully of Christianity and other religions. But the situation in San Francisco is different: Boies and Olsen cannot make their case for homosexual marriage without demonizing religion. And they have a fondness for bashing Catholicism.

Plato condemned sodomy. Jefferson thought it should be a felony. Neither was Catholic. And neither they, nor the Catholic Church, ever thought it was okay for gay bashers to act out their hatred. That this even needs to be said doesn't speak well for where Boies wants to go.

A gay judge, clearly sympathetic to the plaintiffs, presided over the trial. Whatever the outcome (our side expects to lose), it will be appealed to the Ninth Circuit, the most liberal appeals court in the nation. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court will have the last word, but that won't happen for a few years.

DEFUND “SAFE SEX” PROGRAMS

In a new study published in the *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*, abstinence-based sex education programs yielded results far superior to competing strategies. John B. Jemmott III, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, led the federally funded research. This study, which focused on African American students from four public middle schools in the Northeast between the years 2001 and 2004, was hailed by the scientific community for its methodological excellence.

A look at the evidence yields several conclusions, one of which is that “safe sex” programs are a danger to American youth and need to be defunded by the Obama administration immediately.

The student body was divided into four different groups: those who received an abstinence-only education; those who followed a “safe sex” curriculum; those who were exposed to a comprehensive program that included elements of both approaches; and those who were introduced to a “healthy living” curriculum, e.g., advice on eating and exercise.

The worst results stemmed from those who followed the “safe sex” strategy: 52 percent started having sex. The best results came from those who followed the abstinence-only approach: 33 percent started having sex. Those in the blended program, and those in the “healthy living” one, yielded results of 42 and 47 percent, respectively. In other words, even those kids who were not given a sex education program at all did better than those in the “safe sex” group.

The Obama administration mindlessly cut all funding for abstinence-only programs, citing the lack of scientific evidence for such models. Now that their beloved “here’s how to put a condom on a cucumber” approach to sex education is a proven disaster, it’s time to cut “safe sex” programs and put

all the money into abstinence-only ones. It's also time to fund voucher programs: black kids in Catholic schools succeed both in and out of the classroom.

GIVENCHY WAXES RELIGIOUS

Givenchy recently presented its Fall/Winter 2010 fashion collection in France; some of the items were religious-themed.

Givenchy decided to wax religious: the 25 male models wore clothes and accessories that were a showcase of Christian symbols. All but one of the items were inoffensive.

Catholicism was obviously on the mind of designer Riccardo Tisci when he crafted his "JESUS IS LORD" T-shirts, monastic hoods, clerical shirts, patent leather sandals and the like. While they were a little cheeky, they were still done in good taste. What crossed the line, however, were his gold-colored crown of thorns necklaces. It was disturbing enough to see pictures of men wearing this item over a shirt, but to feature a bare-chested model donning it was nothing but contemptible.

There is a difference between being edgy and being obnoxious: the Crown of Thorns that Jesus wore is a very serious statement in Christianity, and it is not fair game to trivialize its meaning.

We asked Givenchy to pull the necklace immediately. As we went to press, we had not yet received a response.

BRIT HUME'S CRITICS ARE REVEALING

When Fox News analyst Brit Hume made a plea to Tiger Woods to turn to Christianity in order to seek forgiveness, a firestorm ensued.

Anyone who doesn't understand the premium that Christianity puts on forgiveness is badly educated, but that is no excuse for the kind of vitriol that was spewed against Hume. For advising Woods to consider Christianity, Hume was roundly condemned by those whose highest virtue is being non-judgmental. Keith Olbermann of MSNBC compared him to Islamic extremists; he was the subject of endless blogs ridiculing him and his religion; and he was counseled by Tom Shales of the *Washington Post* to apologize.

None of Hume's critics, of course, seem to have any problem with the increasingly aggressive campaigns launched by atheists seeking to proselytize Christians. During this past Christmas season, we were treated to a slew of atheist evangelizing efforts, ranging from billboards in towns across America to posters on urban buses, all designed to promote atheism and denigrate Christianity.

In England, author Philip Pullman is pushing for an atheist curriculum in the elementary schools, and his fellow countryman and cohort, Richard Dawkins, wants summer camps aimed at weaning kids away from Christianity. These examples, of course, are seen by Hume's critics as nothing more than exercises in free speech. But when he speaks, as an *analyst*, not as a reporter, he's put on the liberal watch list as a closet Taliban.

When George W. Bush was reelected in 2004, all we heard from this gang was about the coming theocracy that threatened to

engulf America. Even they didn't think that the worst that would happen was a soundbite from Brit Hume touting the teachings of Christianity.

MARTHA COAKLEY THRASHES RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

When Massachusetts senatorial hopeful Martha Coakley, a Roman Catholic, was asked on WBSM radio whether she supports conscience rights for health care employees, she offered a resounding "No." So completely wedded to the extremists in the pro-abortion community, Coakley would not allow Catholic doctors and nurses—who accept the teachings of Catholicism—to recuse themselves from participating in procedures they find morally repugnant.

Coakley said that if she were asked to consider a bill that would say "if people believe that they don't want to provide services that are required under the law and under *Roe v. Wade*, that they can individually decide to not follow the law. The answer is no." When asked by host Ken Pittman about the rights of Catholics who follow the teachings of the Church, Coakley offered the separation of church and state mantra. Pittman then said, "In the emergency room you still have your religious freedom." Coakley conceded that point but hastened to add, "you probably shouldn't work in the emergency room."

This is the opinion of the attorney general of Massachusetts. She effectively told practicing Catholics who work in the health care industry that they ought to get another job. As far as she is concerned, those who invoke a right to conscientious objection—a staple of religious liberty—should

lose.

President Obama says he supports conscience rights for health care workers. The Catholic bishops support conscience rights. Survey after survey show that the American people support conscience rights. But Martha Coakley does not—she says they're all wrong. We were glad to know which side of religious liberty she is on.

HOLLYWOOD GOES APOCALYPTIC

Two apocalyptic films were recently released that dealt with Christianity in wholly different ways: “The Book of Eli” and “Legion.”

“The Book of Eli” puts a positive spin on Christianity. Following a nuclear war which destroyed all copies of the Bible, save for the one in Eli’s possession, he is determined to get the only copy left to a place directed by God; previous religious conflict destroyed all copies of the Torah and Koran. To be successful, Eli must keep the Bible away from a reigning tyrant who is hell bent on getting his hands on it so he can twist biblical teachings to suit his interests.

“Legion” puts a negative spin on Christianity. It features Michael the Archangel crashing down from the heavens to save the unborn child of the Virgin Mary-like character, a waitress who is anything but virginal. Indeed, actress Adrienne Palicki plays such a loose character that she said in an interview, “Who didn’t I have sex with in the movie?” No matter, the film suggests God is the father of her Jesus-like messiah child. The entire story takes place on Christmas Eve.

Both movies are violent, and both scripts seize upon the apocalypse. But that's where the similarities end. It is telling that Sony is responsible for the film that is not exactly Christian-friendly. Sony, of course, gave us "The Da Vinci Code" and "Angels and Demons" so it knows how to tweak Christian sensibilities.

ATTACK ON PIUS XII IS UNSEEMLY

An article by Deborah Dwork and Eric Greenberg criticizing the Church for pursuing the cause of sainthood for Pope Pius XII was recently published on the website of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Dwork, a specialist in Holocaust studies at Clark University, and Greenberg, a rabbi and director of interfaith policy for the ADL, have the credentials, but their judgment was questionable.

They began their remarks by saying that "Pius refused even to say the word Jew during his famous Christmas speech of 1942." But the *New York Times* knew who the pope was referring to at the time: "No Christmas sermon reaches a larger congregation than the message Pope Pius XII addresses to a war-torn world at this season. This Christmas more than ever he is a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent." Nowhere in the *Times'* editorial of December 25, 1942 did it mention the word Jew, but it's clear what the editorial was referring to. Indeed, the *Times* ran an editorial on Christmas day, 1941, singling out the pope among the world leaders: "The voice of Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness

enveloping Europe this Christmas.”

The *New York Times* was not alone in praising the heroics of Pius XII. So was Greenberg’s organization: the ADL wrote gloriously of his efforts. So did the World Jewish Congress, Golda Meir, Albert Einstein, Emilio Zolli (the chief rabbi in Rome—he converted to Catholicism after the war, taking Pius’ name as his baptismal name), and many others. Furthermore, Israeli diplomat Pinchas Lapid credited the pope with saving as many as 860,000 Jewish lives. Today, English historian Sir Martin Gilbert credits the Church for its yeoman service.

There is always room for just criticism, but for Dwork and Greenberg to conclude that the cause for sainthood for Pope Pius XII is “an act of aggression against the Jewish people” is flat out unseemly.

SARAH SILVERMAN GOES OFF THE RAILS

On February 4, Sarah Silverman appeared on “The View”; during the show they played a small portion of her obscene rant (the most vile comments were omitted) against Pope Benedict XVI that she made last October on Bill Maher’s show.

Silverman got a pass when she first aired her foul-mouthed attack on the pope and had it repeated on “The View,” much to the delight of Elizabeth Hasselbeck and Joy Behar. By contrast, reporters are still asking Mel Gibson about his drunken anti-Semitic remarks he made four years ago.

If they had any guts, they would have aired the most

indefensible thing Silverman said on Maher's show. She said that if the pope sold the Vatican, he "will get crazy p***y. All the p***y."

Silverman was nothing if not defensive about her anti-Catholic remarks being made by a Jew. She said that this "has nothing to do with me being Jewish. You know, a lot of mail was like 'What if it was Jewish?' You know, yeah. If the Jews owned something like that I would be, I'd have no religion. I'm not talking as a Jew. I just can't help that I'm a Jew—it comes out of my pores."

Silverman should feel guilty. Just as it is despicable for ex-Catholics like Hasselbeck and Behar to relentlessly assault Catholic sensibilities, it is despicable for a Jew to do so as well.

Later that night, Silverman appeared on Behar's CNNH show where the host questioned her about the rant. Instead of apologizing, Silverman reiterated what she said in the Maher video that if the pope sold the Vatican, "any involvement in the Holocaust" would be discounted.

When she was asked whether the public should accept Mel Gibson's apology for his drunken anti-Semitic comments made four years ago, she made a snide remark dismissing the apology altogether. Then she added, "I don't think he has a problem with the Jews, he just wants to clear up the fact that the Holocaust never happened."

The fact that the pope's "involvement" in the Holocaust was limited to his conscription into the Hitler Youth program, along with every other young German boy at the time, and that he escaped at the first chance, was never mentioned by Silverman. To libel him the way she did is downright shameful.

The fact that after he made his drunken comments, Gibson apologized "specifically to everyone in the Jewish community for the vitriolic and harmful words that [he] said," and that

Gibson never denied the Holocaust, must have slipped her mind. Ergo, he was also libeled.

Sarah Silverman writes a script using obscene language about the pope, libels him, repeats the offense, extends no apology, is hailed as a hero and suffers no penalty. Mel Gibson makes drunken comments about Jews, apologizes and is still vilified. The double standard is sickening.

Some say that Silverman was just joking, but we're not buying it. So was Don Imus.

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST DRAWS HEAT

The National Prayer Breakfast is held the first Thursday of every February, and is attended by senior members of the incumbent administration and Congress. The Washington event, which attracts some 3,500 leaders from the U.S. and abroad, is organized by a Christian group, The Fellowship Foundation (a.k.a. "The Family"), that keeps a low profile. This year the secular left pressured the president, and others, not to attend.

The stated reasons for opposing the event included the organizer's alleged "shadowy" nature and the invitation extended to David Bahati, the Ugandan lawmaker who wrote a bill labeled as anti-gay. Those leading the charge included pundits and activists like Adele M. Stan, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Huffington Post writers, *Mother Jones*, et al. A press conference protesting the event was held by the likes of practicing gay Episcopal

Bishop Gene Robinson, Americans United leader Barry Lynn, and spokesmen for assorted homosexual groups.

The real reason for the opposition had to do with censoring the voice of religious conservatives in Washington. Bahati, for example, did not go, so that issue was a non-starter. Moreover, Hillary Clinton is a long-time member of The Fellowship Foundation, making silly the “shadowy” accusation. Indeed, if the Secretary of State isn’t bothered by the group, then that just goes to show how utterly fringe the opposition is.

Surely the secular left see in President Obama one of their own. But he knows how it would look if he broke stride with precedent, especially at a time when the public is not exactly jumping for joy over his performance. Not surprisingly, he went to the event. He also did not disappoint his supporters: he condemned the Ugandan law in question.

The Catholic League recognizes that parts of the Ugandan bill are downright intolerable: it is immoral to even consider legislation that calls for the death penalty to be invoked against gays *qua* gays. But we also must protest those who have an ulterior motive by seeking to shut down the National Prayer Breakfast altogether.

For the record, the Catholic Church in Uganda is working to delete the most offensive parts of the bill. We hope they prevail.