

CONFESSIONAL AID INTRODUCED; MOCKERY AND INSULTS FLY

A novel Confessional aid was introduced in February that immediately became the source of commentary, some of which drew a sharp rebuke from the Catholic League.

The aid, "Confession: A Roman Catholic App," was developed to prepare Catholics for Confession [an app is a computer application, or program, that can be accessed via a cell phone and other devices to acquire specific information about a variety of subjects].

Specifically, this application guides Catholics through an examination of conscience, tapping into issues addressed by the Ten Commandments. It received an imprimatur from Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

The app was never designed as a substitute for Confession: on the contrary, it makes it clear that only absolution by a priest in the confessional constitutes the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Even though most Internet stories mentioned this, many of the headlines were misleading. Here are just a few of them:

"Catholic Church Approves Confession by iPhone"; "US Bishop Sanctions Cell Phone in Confession"; "Forgiveness via iPhone: Church Approves Confession App"; "New, Church-Approved iPhone Offers Confession On the Go"; "Catholics Can Now Confess Using iPhone App"; "Confess Your Sins to a Phone in Catholic Church Endorsed App"; "Catholic Church Approves Online Confession."

Even worse was what Jay Leno said in his February 9 monologue: "Well, the Catholic Church has come out with a new app for the iPhone. This is real. You can confess right on the phone. How perfect is that? You can now cheat and atone for your sins all on the same device. Perfect for Brett Favre. Fantastic. You know what the name of the app is? I'm not making it up. It's called 'Priest in Your Pocket.' Really. Is that the best name they could come up with?"

The worst part of Leno's commentary was not that he deliberately misled the public—there is no such thing as Confession on the phone (the app is a preparatory aid)—it was

his ugly shot at priests: The name of the app is called, "Confession: A Roman Catholic app." It is not called "Priest in Your Pocket."

Leno has an obsession with portraying priests as sexual predators; we have tallied over 30 such assaults.

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"THE RITE" STUFF

From the perspective of the Catholic League, the most interesting aspect of the hit movie, "The Rite," was how the media treated a film on exorcism.

Unfailingly, whenever there is a television show or movie that touches on subjects like Transubstantiation—the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus—the Virgin birth, apparitions, the stigmata, even confession, it is the subject of ridicule and insulting commentary. But not when it comes to the phenomenon of exorcism.

Several Catholic League staffers reviewed over 600 movie reviews of "The Rite" that appeared in mainline media outlets. Aside from a few snotty remarks, the subject of exorcism was given a respectful hearing: none was derisive.

The cast of "The Rite" was also respectful: none lambasted the idea that demons could be purged by a trained Roman Catholic priest. This was especially true of the lead actor who played the priest who performed the exorcisms, British actor Anthony Hopkins. Raymond Arroyo, a member the Catholic League's board of directors, had a particularly insightful interview with Hopkins on his EWTN show, "The World Over."

This is good news. Evil exists, and everyone save for a fringe minority, admits it. More important, the belief that the devil can be conquered also exists. That the Catholic Church has a mechanism to deal with it is hardly surprising. After all, it was founded by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

IDEOLOGICAL BLINDERS

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

William Donohue

It is not easy to be objective, but it is not impossible. Judges in the courtroom, along with Olympic judges in diving and ice skating events, generally do a good job. While departures from objectivity can be expected, the expectation that professionals who sit in judgment ought to be held to standards of objectivity is entirely reasonable. Problems emerge when the departures become routine, and this is unfortunately a common condition among the chattering class: too often, ideology rules.

Let me give you two recent examples. Two months after our victory against the Smithsonian, the leading art critic for the New York Times, Michael Kimmelman, wrote an article comparing the reaction of Americans who find some artwork offensive to their European counterparts. Guess who came off the worst? This was due, in no small part, to us (he even dug up our 1999 protest against the "Sensation" exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art). But a close read of what he said undermines his conclusion.

According to Kimmelman, the Europeans reacted with "mildly appalled bafflement" to Catholic League objections to the ants-on-the-crucifix video. "It all seems inexplicable to them," he said. That's because "Cultural free expression and independence of public arts institutions...are taken for granted across modern Europe." As opposed, of course, to those Neanderthals in the U.S., led by the Catholic League. Well, not so fast.

Kimmelman says that when the "Sensation" exhibition opened in England in 1997, they weren't at all upset with the portrait of Our Blessed Mother adorned with elephant dung and pornographic cutouts. He takes this as a good sign. I don't. No matter, the Brits did get angry about another "Sensation" exhibit, the portrait of Myra Hindley, a convicted child murderer.

So far, so good. We were angry with the Virgin Mary portrait, and the Brits were angry with the Myra Hindley one. But unlike the Catholic League, which organized a non-violent demonstration outside the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Brits, according to Kimmelman, "splattered ink and raw egg on the canvas."

So we acted civilly, and they resorted to vandalism. Yet we're the ones lacking in respect for "cultural free expression." Didn't Kimmelman see this? To top things off, the venue which hosted the art we objected to was publicly funded; the art the Brits objected to was in a private gallery.

Here's another recent example, also taken from the New York Times. On February 4, there was a story on why 41 percent of all the pregnancies in New York City result in abortion (blacks lead with a 74 percent rate). The reporters cited four reasons, two of which made sense: easy abortion laws in New York, and ambivalence on the part of poor girls on whether to have the baby. But there were two that were totally implausible: "the absence of mandatory sex education in New York City public schools," and "the ignorance of people, especially young ones, about where to get affordable birth control."

They mention a 17-year-old who came back for her second abortion. "The girl said she sometimes used condoms," they wrote. Is it safe to say she is not suffering from ignorance? "But I wasn't using them when I got pregnant," she told them. Here's the best: "I might use them more now, but I don't

know.” It should be obvious, but sadly it is not, that no amount of education is going to change this girl’s behavior.

Then we are introduced to a 20-year-old, also a repeat offender; she had her first abortion when she was 16. She explains what happened: “It was an accident. I used a condom every time, but I already have a kid, and I’m not ready for another one.” Condoms that don’t work? What a shocker! Or maybe she and her partner failed to follow all the steps that are required for proper condom use as approved by the Centers for Disease Control—there are more than a dozen!

If ignorance about where to get affordable birth control is a problem, then how could it possibly be that these same reporters end their article by saying the following: “The health department distributes a pocket-size guide to clinics where teenagers can get medical care and low-cost or free contraception (information that is also available through the city’s 311 hot line).” More than that, they write that “Condoms are distributed through health offices at every public high school.”

What Kimmelman and these reporters have in common is this: they arrived at their conclusions before they did their story. In fairness, it would be wrong to say they are dishonest: if they were, they wouldn’t offer evidence that is contrary to their conclusions. No, their problem is deeper—they are blinded by ideology.

This is what we’re up against all the time. We provide evidence of Catholic bashing, but all the data, logic and reason mean nothing to those whose ideology has literally blinded them to reality. The only good news is that most Americans can be persuaded by the empirical evidence, and it is they—not the cultural elites—whom we seek to convince.

SMITHSONIAN STILL DOESN'T GET IT

The dustup over the hosting of a vile video of ants crawling over Jesus at the Smithsonian, spilled over into the new year. There were several panel discussions in several American cities and in Europe discussing the decision of the Smithsonian to remove the video from the National Portrait Gallery and the role that the Catholic League played. But at none of these panels did anyone involved make any sort of genuflection that indicated they could see how some Christians were offended by David Wojnarowicz's video, "A Fire in My Belly."

At the Town Hall Los Angeles forum that was held recently, Smithsonian Secretary Wayne Clough had a chance to address the concerns of Christians, but he took a pass. Instead he defended the video as a "work of art." He did say that "there is a concern, absolutely," that the Smithsonian may lose donors because he bowed to our pressure and had the video removed. As usual, it is the cash that consumes these people. And who are "these people"? They are basically the same people that we dealt with in 1998 when the Catholic League protested the play, "Corpus Christi," and again the following year when we protested the "Sensation" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art: they are narcissists who worship at the altar of art. The artistic community is without doubt the most self-absorbed segment of the American society. They believe they have a right to pick the pockets of the taxpayers to fund their "art," but the taxpayers have no right to complain when their religion is assaulted.

"Corpus Christi" depicted Christ having sex with the apostles. "Sensation" showed a portrait of Our Blessed Mother with elephant dung and pornographic cutouts on it. "A Fire in My Belly" features large ants running all over Jesus on the Cross. Never have any of those who defended these masterpieces shown one degree of empathy for Christian sensibilities.

At the end of January, Smithsonian officials met and discussed the fallout over "A Fire in My Belly." Although they stood by Clough's decision to pull the video, they offered a few recommendations thus creating a smokescreen.

"Culturally sensitive exhibitions should be previewed from a diverse set of perspectives," said the Regents Advisory Panel. What exactly does this mean? If a swastika is painted on a synagogue, should those who find it endearing be consulted? If "KKK" is plastered across a portrait of Rev. Martin Luther King, must those who can't decide if this is offensive be summoned for advice? Now imagine if there was a video of large ants running all over an image of Muhammad, would it be incumbent on Smithsonian officials to find someone who likes such fare? Would it change things if we substituted the crucified Jesus for Muhammad?

Speaking of the artist who made the video, the Smithsonian's John W. McCarter Jr., said, "I believe, in his mind, that [the video] was not sacrilegious." Did he happen to stumble upon Wojnarowicz's diary? Has he been channeling him? McCarter also asked us to consider the possibility that the video "might have been very deeply religious."

McCarter's subjectivism was unwarranted. We know some things about the artist, and what we know is that he branded the Catholic Church a "house of walking swastikas." So why is it so hard to connect the dots? Isn't it obvious the artist was a raging anti-Catholic bigot? Let's face it: if an artist offended Jews, African Americans or Muslims—as in the examples cited above—the artwork alone would be cause for censorship, never mind investigating any harbored prejudices he may have had.

If a man like Wojnarowicz can insult Christians the way he did, knowing full well his sentiments on Catholicism, and he is still given the benefit of the doubt—even to the point of entertaining the fiction that his video is "very deeply religious"—then it is obvious what is going on.

MOMA HOSTS VILE VIDEO

New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) recently acquired "A Fire in My Belly." MoMA joined in with dozens of other museums around the country that just can't get enough of the ant crawlers and are proudly displaying the vile video.

In Tucson following the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, President Barack Obama correctly noted that "our discourse has become so sharply polarized" that it has disfigured our society. He made note of the "lack of civility" which marks our culture, beckoning us to "sharpen our instincts for empathy." One day later, MoMA announced that he was wrong. It wants a sharply polarized society; it delights in incivility; and it abhors empathy. That is why it decided to assault Christian sensibilities by acquiring and airing the video.

"We really do live in a time when anything can be hailed as a work of art. This has naturally led to a proliferation of pretentious and often pathological nonsense in the art world." Those words were penned ten years ago by noted art critic Roger Kimball. As evidenced by the reaction to this "artwork" by the artistic community, nothing has changed.

Unlike the Smithsonian, which is federally funded, MoMA is largely supported by fat cats like Glenn D. Lowery, the museum's director, thus alleviating some of our objections.

NEW YORK TIMES EXPLOITS SMITHSONIAN ISSUE

On January 26, there was a front-page article in the *New York Times* Arts Section regarding the video that was pulled by the Smithsonian after a Catholic League protest. It was remarkable on several fronts.

To begin with, by publishing a large still from the ants-on-the-crucifix video, the *New York Times* helped to convince the

public that our protest was justified. Most people, certainly most practicing Christians, do not want their money going to fund venues that exhibit such fare. Moreover, it is clear that those who label this stuff “art” have lost all powers of discernment. As such, we reasoned, they should pay for their leisurely pursuits on their own dime.

The reporter, Michael Kimmelman, accused Bill Donohue of embarking on an “awfully well-choreographed pas de deux to rekindle the culture wars.” He pointedly commented that Rep. John Boehner, now the Speaker of the House, and Rep. Eric Cantor, “capitalized on Mr. Donohue’s protest” by registering their own complaints. Because this was allegedly choreographed by Donohue, in Kimmelman’s mind this surely smacked of a conspiracy.

But had Kimmelman bothered to call Donohue, he would have learned that the Catholic League president has never met, nor spoken to, Rep. Boehner or Rep. Cantor. This entire controversy started when Donohue fielded a phone call at home on a Monday night from a reporter for the *New York Post* who asked his opinion of the vile video. The next day, Donohue saw the video online and put out a statement.

Kimmelman also accused Donohue of feigning outrage, citing the Catholic League 1999 protest of the “Sensation” exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art as another example. He said Donohue engaged in the “same paroxysm of orchestrated grief over a work combining an image of the Virgin Mary with elephant dung,” mentioning how our protest was joined by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. It was telling how the reporter failed to mention the pornographic cutouts that adorned the painting. At any point, it was interesting to learn that Kimmelman claims to know Donohue’s motive, yet cited no evidence for his conjecture.

The arrogance of Kimmelman, which is quite common in the artistic community, came shining through. After unfavorably comparing the United States to Britain, he says that in America, there is “the presumption that *ordinary taxpayers* have a right to intervene via their political representatives in curatorial affairs because museums get tax breaks.” [Our italic.]

Kimmelman should know that museums don’t get tax breaks—they get money from those “ordinary taxpayers.” The term “ordinary”

is a give-away: Kimmelman looks down his nose with contempt at the average American. Why? Because, like their friends in the professoriate, the artistic community feels unappreciated. They also exude anger at those who would dare challenge their competence. They believe they are entitled to the taxpayers' money, and that it should be a one-way street: the "ordinary taxpayer" is too stupid to pass judgment on what qualifies as art, and that is why people like Kimmelman should be entrusted to make such determinations.

Kimmelman is hardly alone in never once showing any interest in why Christians might reasonably be offended by this "art." Indeed, there were protests and forums galore, on both sides of the Atlantic, on this controversy, but never once did we read about any artist who stood up and said, "Maybe we should try to look at this from the perspective of a practicing Catholic."

Instead, all we heard is how *we misinterpreted* the video. But if motive counts, then the artist, as we have seen, could easily be indicted for intentionally attacking Christians; he had a particularly disturbing track record of promoting hate speech.

What was really hard to read was Kimmelman's characterization of the artist, David Wojnarowicz, as a man who wielded a cudgel to "fight bigots." Is that what he was doing when he made a video showing Jesus' head exploding? Was he also fighting bigotry when he called John Cardinal O'Connor a "fat cannibal," and labeled the Catholic Church a "house of walking swastikas"?

Much of the sympathy for the bigoted artist stems from homosexuals—not a small segment in artistic circles. Wojnarowicz died of AIDS. Donohue did not shy away from addressing this issue. "Had he followed the teachings of the Catholic Church on sexuality," he said in a news release, "he would be alive today. Instead, he blamed the Church."

Kimmelman was confronted by Donohue directly: "It was not the Catholic Church that killed the artist, David Wojnarowicz: it was gay activists, many of whom are in the artistic community. They were the ones who demanded that the bathhouses be kept open, even as their brothers were dying left and right. To exploit this tragedy any longer is sick. Catholicism is the answer, not the problem."

It all comes together in the end. The same people who do not take responsibility for their own personal behavior, and expect the taxpayers to fund research that might establish a cure for their behaviorally induced diseases, expect the taxpayers to underwrite their work absent any voice in how the money is to be spent. This is narcissism on steroids.

ARE CATHOLICS LIKE ISLAMISTS?

Even regular readers of the *New York Times* were stunned to read a news story that contended that the Catholic community and the Islamists have much in common. "As the Roman Catholic Church includes both those who practice leftist liberation theology and conservative anti-abortion advocates, so the [Muslim] Brotherhood includes both practical reformers and firebrand ideologues."

Our reaction, was, "Sure. So Sister Mary Alice who leans left while working with the poor, and Father Murphy who works with pro-lifers, have much in common with Muslims who differ with each other on whether to kill Jews now or wait until they're elected."

The headline of the February 4 story read, "Islamist Group is Poised to Be a Power in Egypt, but Its Intentions Are Unclear." It is telling that they didn't say an Islamic group—they correctly used the term that describes Muslims who blend Islam with extremist politics. Yet the *Times* still can't figure out their intentions.

When the Brotherhood was founded in 1928, its motto was "Jihad is our way." Nothing has changed since. Their current leaders believe it is important to "Kill Jews—to the very last one." Another leader recently said Egyptians "should prepare for war against Israel." Even the *Times* admitted that "its leaders have endorsed acts of terrorism against Israel and against American troops in Iraq."

It just so happened that the night before this piece ran, another Brotherhood leader said that any government which takes over should withdraw from the 32-year-old peace treaty

with Israel. And the day of the *Times* story there was a statement on an al-Qaida-run website, Muslim.Net, that said "We call upon the Islamists to support the Muslim Brotherhood," a clear indication that whatever differences the two groups have previously had, it's more important that all terrorists unite.

How much of this is motivated out of a political agenda which seeks to put the best possible face on the Muslim Brotherhood, and how much of it is driven by an anti-Catholic animus, isn't clear. Our guess is that it is both.

Unfortunately, many who read the *Times* look upon it as their bible. We read it because it is still the most influential newspaper in the nation. And to be fair, it is well-written and well-researched. We just wish it was less hostile to Catholicism as evidenced by this invidious comparison.

HUFFINGTON POST CORRECTS THE RECORD

The Catholic League got off to a fast start in 2011, clashing heads with the Huffington Post only a few days after the start of the year. After we registered a complaint with the Huffington Post about an erroneous quote attributed to the Catholic League, the decision was made to correct the record and to strike the false claim from the article.

It all started on January 5, when Huffington Post writer Michele Somerville wrote a piece about New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo. Somerville, a professed Catholic who holds a deep seated animus towards the Church, said she likes Andrew Cuomo because he is like his father—a "protest Catholic." By that she meant someone who identifies himself as Catholic, yet defies the teachings of the Church. In the case of the elder Cuomo, she cited his pro-abortion position. What she likes about Andrew Cuomo is more chic: "I love that my new governor stepped up to the altar of the Lord with confidence and

received the Sacrament of the Eucharist with his beloved [an unmarried woman with whom he lives] and three daughters in tow."

Speaking of the two Cuomos, Somerville wrote, "There is no other morally responsible way to be Roman Catholic." That's because she despises their religion, which she said is "propped up by corruption and tyranny," and was partly built by "hegemony and brutality."

Somerville also said that the Catholic League "classifies men like Andrew Cuomo (who divorce and continue to receive the sacraments) 'self-excommunicated Catholics.'" Thus she flatly lied. Indeed, in a New York *Daily News* story, Frank Lombardi correctly wrote, "Even outspoken Catholic activist Bill Donohue of the Catholic League passed on a chance to decry what some religious conservatives would deem 'living in sin.' Donohue declined to be interviewed, saying through a spokesman, 'We're not one to pass judgment' on how people conduct their personal life 'or how people celebrate their religion.'" Somerville even provided a link to the *Daily News* article in her piece.

Soon after our release was issued, we received a call from a Huffington Post editor informing us that Somerville removed the lie about the Catholic League from her article. There was one area of contention, however, regarding the link to the *Daily News* article. Somerville contended that it was a different story on the same topic, we contended that the story Donohue was quoted as not taking a position on Cuomo was cited as a "related story," making it implausible that Somerville never read it, and she put quote marks around a statement that we never made.

This fast result was accomplished in no small part by the efforts of our members who moved so judiciously to contact the Internet site.

MAINSTREAMING BARBARISM

MUSLIM

Pope Benedict XVI recently pleaded with Pakistan to abrogate its blasphemy law which allows the killing of those who “insult” Muhammad or the Koran; a senior Pakistani leader, Salman Taseer, was assassinated recently for protesting the death sentence of a Christian woman for the “crime” of converting. The pope was immediately condemned by a senior Muslim cleric for “interfering” in the “Islamic ideological state,” and the leader of the most powerful Islamic party accused the pope of “insulting” Muslims worldwide. Prior to this, more than 500 “moderate” Muslim clerics and scholars defended the assassination, according to a distinguished Pakistani journalist, “educated and articulate Pakistanis chided Taseer, even in death, for writing his own death warrant.”

Consider the following list of recent violent attacks on Christians and Catholics at the hands of Muslims:

- On Christmas Eve, 38 Christians were killed in Nigeria (2,000 were murdered earlier in the year).
- On Christmas Day, a Catholic chapel was bombed in the Philippines by an al-Qaida funded group.
- On Dec. 30, there were 11 bomb attacks on Christians in Iraq (58 were murdered on Oct. 31 at a Catholic cathedral).
- During the Christmas season, Iran arrested dozens of Christians who were former Muslims.
- On New Year’s Day, at least 23 Catholics were killed during Mass in Egypt (the killings were justified by clerics in Mauritania, and Iran’s official TV organ blamed Jews).

Moreover, Saudi Arabia makes it illegal to practice Christianity; Yemen is threatening to expel Christian workers; Christians who feed starving Somalis are targeted for murder; churches in Indonesia have been ravaged; and two million Christians have been murdered by Sudanese Muslims over the past two decades (many were crucified).

According to Open Doors, which monitors Christian persecution, of the ten most violent places on earth for Christians to live, eight are run by Muslims, and an estimated 100 million

Christians worldwide live in fear. The central problem is the “Islamic ideological state.” There is no such thing as the “Christian or Jewish ideological state.” Let’s face it—Muslim barbarism has been mainstreamed in the name of Islam.

MUSLIM LEADERS ATTACK THE POPE

The president of Al-Azhar, an Egyptian university, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, along with the leading members of the Islamic Research Academy, recently announced that they are breaking off dialogue with the Vatican in response to Pope Benedict XVI’s criticism of Muslim violence against Christians. After the suicide bombing of a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria that killed 23 people, the pope called attention to “non-Muslims being oppressed by Muslim states in the Middle East,” and complained that not enough was being done by Muslim-run governments to protect Christians.

Sheikh Ahmed accused the pope of interfering in an “internal affair,” and began a boycott of future Catholic-Muslim dialogue. This followed an Arab leadership summit that also denounced “foreign interference in Arab affairs.” They also called off the annual inter-religious meeting between the Vatican and Muslim leaders that had been scheduled for February.

We are constantly being told that Islam is just like every other world religion—indeed, it is a religion of peace—and that while every religion has its share of crazies, most Muslims are no different than most Christians and Jews. Yet daily we read about unprovoked violence, or threats of it, against Christians and Jews, and just as often we read how it is justified by leading Muslim clerics in the name of their religion.

If a lone Christian zealot kills an abortionist, he gets zero support from Christian leaders. But when a Muslim woman

decides to convert, there is no end to the number of Muslim leaders who say she should be put to death. If this is what the "religion of peace" believes, God help those who live under its more radical rulers.

The Muslim leaders also blasted the Holy Father again for his 2006 speech at Regensburg University. At that time, the pope warned against the evils of faith without reason, and reason without faith. The pope was right then, and he is right now. Indeed, these Muslims give expression to the former evil.