

DIRT IN DALLAS

Catholics who eat meat on Good Friday will receive free concert tickets. That's what listeners of KDMX radio in Dallas were told on Good Friday. We didn't think it was funny and so we let them know.

Rick Hinshaw, the league's director of communications, placed a call to the station and was told that this was just "tongue-in-cheek." She defended the action by saying that one of the show's hosts was Jewish and that he also parodies Jewish practices. How sweet. By this logic, Hitler was just a joker: there were lots of people he didn't like.

DO YOU PRACTICE?

It's not everyday that an author is asked whether he practices his religion and whether it impacts on the way he writes. Unless he's Catholic.

On April 5, in an unusually unfriendly interview with historian Paul Johnson, Brian Lamb, on C-Span's "Booknotes," began probing the author of *A History of the American People* about his religion.

Lamb: "Almost everything written about you refers to the fact that you are a Roman Catholic. Is that right?"

Johnson: "Yes sir."

Lamb: "You practice?"

Johnson: "Oh yes sir."

Lamb: "Does that impact the way you write about this? 'Cause there's a lot of religion in the book."

Johnson let him off the hook. But we won't: we'd like to know what religion, if any, Lamb ascribes to and whether he practices. Oh yes, we'd also like to know whether that impacts on what questions he poses and to which authors.

LIBERTY AT RISK

On March 25, by a vote of 31-5 with one abstention, the House International Relations Committee voted to accept the Religious Persecution Act (H.R. 2431). Congressman Frank Wolf of Virginia, who is spearheading this important legislation, is determined to stop the existing practice of allowing nations that practice religious persecution to get off scot-free. The Catholic League has formally endorsed the bill.

Unfortunately, attempts are under way to weaken some of the most important provisions of the bill. For example, some want to allow taxpayer dollars to continue to finance trade with offending regimes through the Export-Import Bank, the Trade and Development Agency and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Others are seeking to remove safeguards for individuals seeking asylum in the U.S. because they are fleeing religious persecution.

The three most important Congressmen that members can write to on this issue are House Speaker Newt Gingrich, House Majority Leader Richard Armey and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt. Write to them at the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington D.C. 20515. A vote is scheduled soon.

THE VATICAN AND THE HOLOCAUST

On March 16, the Vatican issued a long-awaited document on the Holocaust, "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah." The document was not an apology, but it was a call for repentance. It stated the Church's understanding of the causes of Hitlerism, the mixed response of Catholics to the Holocaust and the role which Pope Pius XII played in trying to alleviate the suffering of Jews and others.

The response to the document was anything but uniform. Comments ranged from high praise to high condemnation, and many of the remarks were decidedly mixed. There has already been much analysis of the document, as well as commentary on the reactions to it. The Catholic League's position has been to respond to those editorials, articles and cartoons that it found unfair.

What follows is a select sampling of the varied response to "We Remember" that surfaced from the Jewish community.

"I believe that the Vatican statement is correct in asserting that Nazi antisemitism 'had its roots outside of Christianity,' that it was not derived from anti-Jewish doctrines of the church but rather from an 'exacerbated nationalism' and a secular 'pseudo-scientific' racism. Nazi texts provide no evidence that the antisemitism of Hitler or Himmler was informed by the Christian characterization of the Jews as Christ-killers, condemned by God because they refused to recognize the messiah. Nazi rhetoric is drawn from different realms."

Marc Saperstein, professor of Jewish history and director of the program in Judaic studies at George Washington

University. Source:Washington Post, April 1, 1998.

"It is highly optimistic of the document to say that the anti-Semitism of Nazi ideology has its roots outside of Christianity. It denies centuries of Christian contempt and persecution of Jews and Judaism. It should be remembered that anti-Judaism created the atmosphere for the possibility of pagan anti-Semitism."

Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of Interfaith Affairs, Anti-Defamation League. Source: Quoted in Chicago Tribune, March 17, 1998.

"I am sad, sad and deeply disappointed. Tomorrow morning when my Jewish neighbors in my building read the paper, they'll come to me and say, 'Didn't I tell you, they ain't going to change?' And they may be right."

Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of Interfaith Affairs, Anti-Defamation League. Source: Rabbi Klenicki's published "Reading" on the document.

"We [Jews] should understand that, if we were in their [Catholic's] shoes, we might wonder if the dialogue is a bank from which Jews only make withdrawals."

"The organized Jewish community has to educate our people about the tremendous positive changes in the Catholic Church since Vatican II, three decades ago, and especially under the present Pope. I suspect most Jews do not fully understand, if at all, what progress has been made.

"As we desire more study and expression from the Church on sensitive matters, we too should be forthcoming on issues of concern for them. For example, we might at least discuss, if not re-evaluate, our present positions on school vouchers and partial-birth abortion. Most of all, we should be sensitive to what Catholics perceive as a widespread tendency towards 'Catholic-bashing' in American society.

“The Roman Catholic Church is the Jewish people’s best partner in interreligious affairs. It is time for our laity to realize that fact and for our leaders to respond accordingly.”

Rabbi Moses A. Birnbaum, spiritual leader of Plainview Jewish Center in Long Island, and a veteran of interreligious dialogue. Source: Jewish Week, March 27, 1998.

“There are elements in there [the document] that are positive, that hopefully will be picked up and used and made part of Catholic life. And there are some disappointing areas where I think it could have been strengthened greatly.”

Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs, American Jewish Committee. Source: Quoted in Newsday, March 17, 1998.

“To take 10 years and find absolutely no fault in the role of Pope Pius XII calls into question the seriousness of this document.”

Rabbi Marvin Hier, Simon Wiesenthal Center. Source: Quoted by Richard Z. Chesnoff, Daily News, March 18, 1998.

“They [American Jews] did next to nothing to save the Jews of Europe, and worse, they demonized the Jews and Christians who gave their all to turn FDR. Ben Hecht and Peter Bergson were the Jews who led the fight to save the Jews of Europe. They went after FDR with great advertisements in the press in an effort to awaken the nation to the conspiracy of silence that was burying the Jews.

“The court Jews, led by Rabbi Stephen Wise, FDR’s great buddy, went after Hecht and Bergson, told the Jews of America that ‘these guys’ were the enemies of Jews... Wise was aided in this endeavor by The New York Times and The Washington Post, both papers owned by Jews. And by one of the top Jews in Congress, Sol Bloom.

“What bothers me as a Jew is the chutzpah of the Jewish leaders. Let them look into their own archives, let them examine what their ancestors didn’t do to save the Jews of Europe. And the same for the Israelis, who have plenty to answer for.”

Sidney Zion, columnist for the Daily News. Source: Daily News, March 30, 1998.

“What’s lacking is taking moral and historical responsibility for Christian anti-Semitism. It [the document] fails to identify the direct link between the church’s historic teachings of contempt toward the Jews and the cultural environment that facilitated the Holocaust.”

Abraham Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League. Source: Quoted in New York Post, March 17, 1998.

“It is too little, too late. I have no doubt that the church did not do everything it could have to save people... [Pius XII’s] silence cost millions of human lives.”

Meir Lau, Israel’s chief rabbi. Source: Quoted in Los Angeles Times, March 17, 1998.

“I expected much more from the Vatican and much more from this Pope. The document took long in coming, and it does not contain what I believe to be the full story of the Church’s role during the Holocaust years.”

Seymour Reich, former president of B’nai B’rith. Source: Jewish Week, March 20, 1998.

“Spectacular. They are repudiating anti-Semitism.”

Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of the Center for Interfaith Understanding, Ramapo College. Source: Quoted in New York Times, March 17, 1998.

“Those of us who have engaged in dialogue have not yet

succeeded.”

Elan Steinberg, director of the World Jewish Congress. Source: Jewish Week, March 20, 1998.

“What this document demonstrates is that those of us who are engaged in this dialogue have not yet succeeded and there is a need to strengthen the dialogue.”

Rabbi Marc Schneier, Hampton Synagogue, Westhampton Beach, Long Island. Source: Newsday, March 23, 1998.

“It should never be said that Christians were responsible for the Holocaust—Nazis were. Blaming Christians would be as unjustified as holding Jews accountable for the death of Jesus. Individuals were responsible in both situations.”

Ed Koch, former mayor of New York. Source: Daily News, March 27, 1998.

“The butchers were all baptised. The truth is that the majority of Christians did not lift a finger because in their parishes they heard repeated every day that Jews are the perfidious Christ-killers.”

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize winner. Source: Quoted in Reuters news story, March 17, 1998.

“The Jewish response now needs to be cautious and devoid of needless hyperbole. Dialogue is our objective, not diatribe.”

Rabbi Mark L. Shook, Congregation Temple Israel, St. Louis. Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 25, 1998.

QUISLING KNOWS BEST

Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), headed by Frances-the-Quisling-Kissling, has been explicitly labeled by American bishops as an inauthentic Catholic organization. But that has not stopped Kissling from lecturing the bishops on how to do their job.

The growing trend of Catholic hospitals merging with secular medical institutions has been the subject of much controversy, as well as much Catholic bashing. But up until now, at least, no one has had the audacity to tell the bishops to put a lid on it. That's what Kissling wants and she isn't afraid to say it.

"Health care decisions need to be made based on the best judgment of the physician and the desires of the patient," says Ms. Kissling. "The bishops," she adds, "should not get in the middle." Coming from her, that is indeed remarkable. Kissling has spent a good part of her life trying to get in the middle of honest disagreements among good Catholics, exploiting every opportunity for discord that she can find. Now she seeks to up the ante by proclaiming, Quisling Know Best.

With a straight face, Kissling can say that "There is a wholesale assault on the availability of reproductive health care services within the Catholic sector." Translated, this means that it's outrageous that Catholic hospitals don't kill children. Oh, by the way, lest anyone think that Kissling has been shut out of all Catholic circles, please note that the *National Catholic Reporter* proudly ran her dishonest pro-contraception ad in its April 10 edition. It blamed the bishops for the high rate of abortions.

MOVIE UPDATE

Hollywood's fascination with religion continues with "The Prophecy II." It stars Christopher Walken as the evil angel Gabriel; having been cast out of hell, Gabriel seeks to create havoc in heaven and on earth. Gabriel pursues a nurse who is to give birth to a half-angel child. The nurse is played by Jennifer Beals, of "Flashdance" fame and "Nothing Sacred" shame.

All we know about "The Proposition" is that one review said it featured "a lusty young priest." We await the day when we spot a review about "a lusty young rabbi."

Frank McCourt's ruminations about things Catholic continue to interest us. But now that his best-selling book, "Angela's Ashes," has been picked up by Paramount Pictures, our interest has heightened. How Paramount handles this work will be fun to watch.

DOLCE & GABBANA'S FIXATION

It's hard to say what the motivation is, but there is little question that Dolce & Gabbana seems obsessed with Our Blessed Mother. In last month's *Catalyst*, we noted the designer's dress that featured a full-length picture of Madonna, her head placed squarely in the pelvic area; we also noted the crude comments that Hollywood actors had to say about it. But it now seems that D&G have gone overboard.

D&G has a whole line of apparel and emblems that uses illustrations of Mary, the Christ child, crosses, etc. While none of the representations have been doctored so as to insult, the very fact that D&G is investing in this line of fashion raises our eyebrows. Yes, there is a line between the reverential display of religious icons and the blasphemous misuse of them. But it is also true that the commercial appropriation of Catholic symbols, done strictly to make a fashion statement, is in bad taste.

SMUT RADIO

K-Rock radio in New York hosts Howard Stern and likes to play Marilyn-the Satanist-Manson tunes. So it wasn't a shocker to learn that one of its D.J.'s recently ripped Pope John Paul II on the air.

Here's a pretty close account of what "Cane" the D.J. had to say. "Man, am I glad I was raised Lutheran. What's the deal with that pope guy anyway? Dirty old man walking around in a dress. I would not let me kid near that guy. You know what he has under that dress, don't you? Candy for all the little kids he is after."

A Brooklyn Catholic heard this and wrote to the station. We were delighted to know that an apology was quickly forthcoming. Moreover, we sent a letter to the station registering our concerns while gladly acknowledging the apology. We beckoned the program manager to advise his staff against any future outbursts of this kind.

What's nice about this story is that the letter writer didn't wait for the Catholic League to act first. He contacted us, along with eight other organizations, after he mailed his

missive. It shows how much influence one person can have, never mind an organization.

NO TO “LIFE PARTNERS”

The Philadelphia/South Jersey chapter of the Catholic League, headed by Arthur Delaney, is supporting the efforts of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in opposing a “life partners” bill. The legislation seeks to put alternative lifestyles on the same legal, social and moral plane as the institution of marriage. The Philadelphia chapter placed an ad in *Catholic Standards and Times* urging Catholics to stand behind Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua.

CONSERVATIVE BIGOTRY

The Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review*, owned by the wealthy Richard Mellon Scaife, is known for its conservative political bent, especially when it comes to financing its war against President Clinton. Not as well known is its raging enthusiasm for the politics of abortion. Another addition to its legacy is affording columnists an opportunity to bash Catholicism.

On April 4, Donald Collins wrote a piece, “In time, papal apologies will cover reproductive rights, immigration,” summoning the call for more abortions and more restrictions on immigration; he also took a cheap shot at Pope Pius XII.

Collins reflected that Pius was not around anymore “to

shoulder the blame for the Vatican's behavior during World War II." Evidently, Collins is unaware that Israel scholar and diplomat, Pinchas Lapid, found that Pius was responsible for saving 860,000 Jews during the Holocaust. This prompted William Donohue to ask: "how many Jews did Protestants save?"

Collins wasted no time blaming Pope John Paul II for the deaths of women who undergo botched abortions, especially in places like Africa. True to form, he had absolutely nothing to say of the millions of children who lose their lives each year at the hands of licensed abortionists. What was particularly noteworthy about his article was his whining that 90 percent of all new immigrants to the U.S. are Catholics. Why he didn't summon the sirens is not known.

Population purists, from the Rockefellers to the Scaifes, have long championed abortion and a man-the-borders paranoia. The target groups, of course, are dark-skinned minorities and Catholics. "No wonder," said Donohue, "some liberals think conservatives are bigots."