

THE CONFUSION OVER KERRY'S ANNULMENT

The Catholic League does not possess a theological micrometer that judges, with digital precision, how "good" a Catholic is. Furthermore, it is not our business anyway. But it is also true that we will not pretend disinterest in subjects that touch on the issue of Catholics in public life.

We noted with some interest that the *New York Times* reported on April 2 that Senator John Kerry "sought an annulment from the church when he was divorced from his first wife." Curiously, it did not say that the annulment was ever granted.

The April 5 edition of *Time* magazine carried an article about Senator Kerry that was even more interesting. It said of Kerry, "He is enough of a stickler for Catholic rules to have sought an annulment of his 18-year first marriage before marrying again."

But Kerry deserves no credit whatsoever because what *Time* said was patently false: Kerry did not seek an annulment until after he married Teresa Heinz in a civil ceremony in 1995. We contacted *Time* about the error and, to its credit, it ran a correction in its April 26 edition.

Kerry has made it very clear that he does not want to talk about the subject of his annulment. But he has also made it very clear that he considers himself to be "a practicing and believing Catholic." So what gives? Here's what we know.

Kerry got divorced from Julia Thorne, an Episcopalian, in 1988. He married Teresa Heinz in May 1995 in a civil ceremony. He never pursued an annulment of his first marriage until a year and a half after his second. When asked about this in February 1997, he said it was a private matter. That's fine, but on May 8, 1997, Kerry publicly joked about his quest for

an annulment on the Don Imus show.

Here's what Kerry told Imus: "Seventy-five percent of all annulments in the world take place in the United States, and I guess the figure drops to 50 percent if you take out all Massachusetts politicians." He continued saying, "It's one of those special Catholic things. It's like confession or feeling guilty about things you haven't even thought of doing."

On February 16, 2004, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that Kerry's office didn't respond to several e-mail and telephone requests regarding the question of whether an annulment was granted. On March 23, 2003, the *Providence Journal-Bulletin* said that Kerry "will not say whether he obtained an annulment of his first marriage...." Why the reticence, especially since Kerry says his "current marriage is in good graces with the church?"

We stayed on this issue until we learned that Kerry did, in fact, receive an annulment. Had Kerry been forthright about the subject, all the speculation could have been avoided.

BISHOPS HAVE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS

In the wake of attacks against those bishops who have spoken with clarity on the subject of Catholic pro-abortion politicians, the Catholic League came rushing to their defense. Here is what we told the media:

"Senator John Kerry is getting endorsed by Protestant ministers in African Methodist Episcopal churches and almost no one complains. But when Catholic bishops discuss what to do

about Catholic politicians who never stand up for the right of unborn babies to live, some go bonkers. The hypocrisy is evident to everyone save for the unprincipled.

“Practicing Catholics are proud of bishops like Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis; Archbishop Sean O’Malley of Boston; Archbishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans; Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver; Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska; Bishop William Weigand of Sacramento, California; Bishop Robert Carlson of Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Bishop John Smith of Trenton, New Jersey. They have spoken with clarity on the need of Catholic public office holders, and seekers, to be respectful of the Church’s teachings on the life issues.

“Now we have the likes of Ellen Goodman, whose passion for abortion rights is off-the-charts, sticking her nose into the affairs of the Catholic Church by telling bishops how to act in an election year. ‘A wafer watch’ is how she derisively titles her concerns. Then we have ex-seminarians like Dick Ryan informing readers of *Newsday* that Catholic bishops should be treated like second-class citizens. Frances Kissling, an anti-Catholic, is also seeking to silence the bishops.

“It won’t work. Today’s bishops are not afraid of speaking their mind. And that is why attempts to censor their speech will not work. The bishops understand what their critics do not: life issues like abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research and cloning are of such paramount importance that they are not analogous to issues like public funding of soup kitchens. Before one can enjoy a bowl of soup, he or she must first have the right to be born. This sounds pedestrian to us, but it will obviously come as a revelation to others.”

VICTORY IN MARYLAND SCHOOL

This spring we learned that officials at Hyattsville Middle School in Hyattsville, Maryland prohibited students from wearing rosaries. In a memo to parents, it said, "In our training about gangs, we have been informed that wearing rosaries as jewelry often is a gang symbol."

What bothered us was not a legitimate concern about gangs hijacking religious symbols. What got our goat was a statement which said, "Our country is built on the premise of the separation of church and state. Therefore, we are asking that our students refrain from wearing rosaries or other items such as bandanas that might be associated with gangs."

In a letter to the CEO of Prince George's County Public Schools, William Donohue wrote:

"There are several problems here, including constitutional ones. As I've indicated, there is nothing wrong with a school that decides to ban religious symbols that are being worn for the purpose of conveying a gang message (as opposed to religious expression). But when separation of church and state is invoked, it suggests that all religious symbols are prohibited. Would this mean that Christians cannot wear a cross, and that Jews cannot wear a Star of David? And why, if the First Amendment provision regarding church and state is being invoked, does it make sense to lump rosaries (a religious symbol) with bandanas (a secular symbol)?"

Donohue implored Dr. André J. Hornsby to intervene in this matter. "Go ahead and ban religious symbols that are being abused by gangs to get their message across," Donohue said, "but don't condition this edict on the grounds of separation of church and state. That is casting the net too wide, needlessly making this an issue of constitutional law."

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Donohue saying that an apology has been given by the principal. Moreover, a series of steps has been taken to assure that nothing like this ever happens again.

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SEXUAL ABUSE OF STUDENTS EXPLODES; PUBLIC OFFICIALS ASKED TO RESPOND

In a recent edition of *Education Week*, there was an article by Caroline Hendrie, "Sexual Abuse by Educators is Scrutinized," that suggested that the degree of sexual abuse in the public schools is at a crisis level.

Hofstra University professor Charol Shakeshaft was commissioned by the Bush administration to do a literature search of existing studies on this subject; this was to be the groundwork upon which a national study would be launched. She concluded that "the physical sexual abuse of students in schools is likely more than 100 times the abuse by priests." The article also says that there are no plans at this time to conduct the national study.

William Donohue immediately took action. Here is how he framed the issue for the media:

"I have written U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige urging him to authorize a national study of the problem of sexual abuse in the public schools. I have also asked him to put Professor Charol Shakeshaft in charge of the study. The provision in the No Child Left Behind program that mandated such a study should not be dismissed by education department

officials who would prefer not to deal with this issue. I have also recommended to Secretary Paige the establishment of a national database on the sexual abuse of students.

“I have also written to all the state attorneys general. ‘Given that many attorneys general throughout the U.S. were impelled to subpoena the personnel files of priests,’ I said, ‘it is only just that the personnel files of teachers be subpoenaed as well. Not to do so would smack of selective indignation—even prejudice—and that is not something the citizenry would approve.’

“Where is the media in all this? Isn’t it news that the number of public school students who have been abused by a school employee is more than 100 times greater than the number of minors who have been abused by priests? All those reporters, columnists, talking heads, attorneys general, D.A.’s, psychologists and victims groups who were so quick on the draw to get priests have a moral obligation to pursue this issue to the max. If they don’t, they’re a fraud.”

Though we have yet to hear from Secretary Paige, members will be happy to know that we received dozens of letters from state attorneys general. Whether they act on our recommendation is another matter altogether.

DRESS-UP JESUS PULLED AFTER PROTEST

Urban Outfitters, a Philadelphia company that sells T-shirts and an array of merchandise targeted at young people, has decided not to carry its magnetized figure of Jesus on the cross anymore; the figure of Jesus wearing underwear could be

altered by putting various clothing items on it (e.g., a devil's outfit and a hula skirt).

Here is what Catholic League president William Donohue told the media:

"On January 13, I wrote to Richard A. Hayne, chairman of Urban Outfitters, Inc., commending him for pulling an offensive shirt that the Anti-Defamation League had protested. The shirt read, 'EVERYONE LOVES A JEWISH GIRL,' and was surrounded by dollar signs. But I also requested that his company discontinue several items that are offensive to Christians, including those that featured Jesus. It sure took him long enough to do so, but at least he got the message and has now decided to pull this item. Perhaps my blasting the company on the MSNBC TV show, 'Scarborough Country,' had something to do with the decision.

"But we're not satisfied. That's because the company is still selling some T-shirts of Jesus and Mary that are offensive. Thus, we will keep the heat on Urban Outfitters until it starts treating Christians as the equal of Jews and pulls all these T-shirts. It is quite interesting to learn that the guy who created the dress-up Jesus, Bob Smith, went to see 'The Passion of the Christ' dressed as Satan. His complaint that someone threw a cup of soda at him strikes us as a whine. Did he expect a handshake?"

PAT ROBERTSON HOSTS CHURCH CRITIC

On the March 3 edition of "The 700 Club," TV evangelist Pat Robertson ran a segment on celibacy in the Catholic Church.

Invited to appear with Robertson was therapist A.W. Richard Sipe. Sipe used the occasion of the latest report on sexual abuse by priests to challenge the wisdom of celibacy.

We let fly with the following news release:

"With great delight did the embittered ex-priest, Richard Sipe, inform his new friend Pat Robertson that the Catholic Church was more corrupt today than at any time since the Reformation. Enthralled by the figure of 4 percent of priests accused of molesting minors since 1950, Sipe failed to mention the results of national surveys taken by Christian Ministry Resources in 2002. The *Christian Science Monitor* summed up the surveys' conclusion as follows: 'Despite headlines focusing on the priest pedophile problem in the Roman Catholic Church, most American churches being hit with child sexual-abuse allegations are Protestant...' But don't look for the founder of the Christian Coalition to do a show on these findings.

"According to Sipe, only 10 percent of priests are celibate. How did he arrive at this figure? Sipe, who calls his work 'guerrilla research' (meaning he uses anecdotes given to him in his role as shrink), defines violations of celibacy to include 'sexual thoughts and desires.' The wonder is why there are as many as 10 percent of priests who have never experienced such desires. And what is going to happen to the 90 percent who are guilty? They're going straight to Hell: 'You see,' Sipe says, 'one thing about the Catholic teaching is that every sexual thought, or desire, or action, is mortally sinful. Every action, no matter how small, no matter how nuanced, will send a person directly to Hell.' This suggests either profound ignorance of Catholicism or calculated malice. By the way, Robertson's gullibility on this matter is truly revealing.

"Robertson closes with, 'We're not trying to point any fingers, obviously, but it's something that we'd like our Catholic brothers and sisters to do something about for their

own good.' For his own good, Robertson ought to stop with the lectures and start fixing the problems in his own house. Not that we're trying to point any fingers. Obviously!"

On March 4, Rev. Pat Robertson wrote a letter to William Donohue defending his decision to host Sipe. Here is how Robertson began his letter: "Please know that we are on the same side. I have been an enthusiastic supporter of Catholic causes for decades and have in no way changed. Frankly, I believe that sending out an intemperate Press Release accusing me of 'lecturing' the Catholic church was somewhat over the top. Friends don't treat friends this way."

Donohue did not reply. It is his belief that friends don't extend a platform to their friend's enemy.

STRAIGHT TALK ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Several high-ranking Catholic clerics made a trip to Albany in March to lobby against same-sex marriage. Of all the bishops, it was Brooklyn's new Ordinary, Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, who spoke most bluntly about the Church's opposition to gay marriage.

In a radio interview, Bishop DiMarzio noted the absurdity of permitting two people of the same sex to marry. Similarly, he questioned the wisdom of allowing three people to marry. But what really drew the ire of homosexuals was his comment, "Why can't we have marriages between people and pets?"

Immediately, the Brooklyn bishop was criticized by New York State Senator Thomas Duane and Kevin Cathcart, executive

director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. The Catholic League rushed to Bishop DiMarzio's defense by releasing the following comment to the press:

"Tom Duane brands Bishop DiMarzio's comment about marriages between people and pets 'nonsensical,' and Kevin Cathcart labels it 'absurd.' But neither offers a principled reason why—if two men can marry—we can't allow Fred to marry Fido. Nor can they make a principled argument against allowing Tom, Dick and Harry to marry. After all, if it's discriminatory not to allow Tom to marry Dick, why isn't it a matter of discrimination to stop Tom and Dick from adding Harry to their marriage? Why should poor Harry be left out in the cold?

"If love is the sole basis for marriage, then what gives society the right to deny a marriage license to Fred and Fido? Or, for that matter, to Sam and Sally, a brother-sister couple who—like in the movie 'The Dreamers'—love each other in a way most people find unnatural? Surely it is irrational to forbid incest! After all, we once made it illegal for whites to marry blacks, didn't we? So isn't it the same to deny Fred and Fido; Tom, Dick and Harry; and Sam and Sally? Wouldn't it be intolerant to say no to this happy trio of lovers? Isn't this what makes America great—equal rights for those who commit bestiality, polygamy, sodomy and incest?

"Thank God we have bishops like Nick DiMarzio. It's about time we forced the crazies to defend their logic."