

Madonna posters come down in wake of Catholic League protest

[Offensive ads](#) depicting pop star Madonna and the Virgin Mary and Infant Jesus quickly came down from New York City public buses and telephone booths in the wake of a firestorm of protest initiated by the Catholic League in late September.

The ads, which bore the legend "The difference between you and your parents," promoted VH-1, the video music sister channel to MTV. Officials of VH-1 publicly apologized for the ads.

Catholic League president William A. Donohue challenged the appearance of the ads on buses operated by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), a public agency. In an open letter to New York mayor David Dinkins which was released to the news media on September 20, Donohue noted that an ad depicting the Blessed Mother and Jesus would have been rejected out of hand as "religious" but that the VH-1 ad was apparently acceptable because the Catholic symbols were being blasphemed.

New York Post columnist Ray Kerrison was attracted by the story and in a page three article in the September 27 issue of the *Post* noted the offensiveness of the ads, the insensitivity of public officials, and the Catholic League's bold challenge to the mayor.

By mid-morning on the 27th, TV and radio crews were tripping over each other as they trooped in and out of Catholic League headquarters. Interviews with League president Donohue were carried on every major TV outlet in the metropolitan area and distributed nationwide by network radio and TV affiliates as well as by syndicated shows like "Hard Copy" and "A Current Affair." The League's cries of protest were even carried on London radio where Madonna was appearing in a concert being

panned by critics and in Toronto, Canada.

Metropolitan Transit Authority and phone company public relations personnel found themselves swamped with inquiries from the media and calls of protest from irate Catholics. Their official positions and explanations changed almost hourly as the firestorm of protest grew. Initially, MTA officials simply said that the ad met their “advertising guidelines” and were protected by the First Amendment. When it became clear that this lame excuse wasn’t working, the media was told that the posters were scheduled to come down in a few days anyway, so why was everyone getting all excited about them?

By mid-day on Tuesday, League officials knew that the battle had been won when TV crews attempting to cover the story reported back to the League that they were having difficulty finding a poster to film!

The story’s impact was clearly felt at the grass roots level. The Catholic League office was swamped with requests for membership information and Catholic League president Bill Donohue found himself an instant celebrity on the street. On Tuesday afternoon, in an effort to escape the media blitz for a few minutes, he went for a brief walk and stopped to buy a hot dog from a street vendor. While standing there, a complete stranger walked up to him and told him what a great job he was doing.

And the story clearly had impact well beyond the shores of the Hudson river. In Chicago – to cite just one example – the entire Catholic League news release on the Madonna poster was read and commented on for several minutes on WGN, arguably that city’s largest radio station in the middle of their top-rated morning “drive time” broadcast hosted by Bob Collins. A glance at the partial media listing ([page 5](#), [page 6](#)) on the following pages makes it clear that the story made the news across the nation.

In follow-up interviews, after it became clear that the offensive posters were becoming scarce, Dr. Donohue made it clear that as far as the Catholic League was concerned, the situation was still not resolved. Donohue noted the League's concern about the policies which had made the ad's posting possible. Those guidelines were – and remain – clearly inadequate if they permit such blasphemy to be publicly displayed. Donohue asked that the person who ultimately approved this outrageous poster be identified. MTA officials have so far refused to comment.

A Message from Denver

All of us learned as children the simple but profound words that Abraham Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg. He reminded his listeners that our forefathers had created “a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

And much of what he said on that November day in 1863 is particularly meaningful in this September of 1993: For today we are again “engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.”

Today's struggle is at least as dangerous as a war of shot and shell. It is a war of ideas and values. It is a clash of two cultures. And it will certainly decide whether the nation, as created by our forefathers, will survive.

On the one side are those who hold with the traditional values of Western civilization and with the transcendental efficacy of revealed moral truths. On the other side are the secular humanists – the moral nihilists – who deny the validity of any

objective standards of good and evil.

On the one side are those who agree with Washington that "It is impossible to govern rightly without God"- who agree with Jefferson that the liberties of a people – their inalienable rights – are the gifts of a divine Providence. On the other side are the counter culturists who insist that separation of church and state means separation of God and state.

On the one side are those who, like the prescient commentator Alex de Toqueville, foresee the destruction of a democracy that abandons its moral moorings. On the other side are the fiery evangelists of the Age of Aquarius, who would have us "do our thing" – whatever it might be.

They tell us that Judea-Christian precepts of conduct are irrelevant, that family values are anachronistic, that everyone is entitled to establish his or her own moral code.

The views of those who would preserve Western civilization were personified and celebrated last month in Denver by the outpouring of affection and support for the message of His Holiness, Pope John Paul.

The views of secular humanism – that spread like drug-induced hallucinations during the 1960's- were personified and celebrated by the pitiful self-abuse and the spiritual squalor of the spectacle known as Woodstock. From Woodstock to Denver the cultural conflict has raged. It is appropriate – it is essential – that we ask ourselves: How goes that battle? How, we may ask first do the mores of today compare with those of earlier decades? Have we become safer? More stable? Brighter?

William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education, provided some answers when he noted recently that since 1960 – approximately one generation – there has been:

- an almost 600 percent increase in violent crime in the United States;

- an increase of more than 200 percent in teenage suicides;
- a quadrupling of the divorce rate;
- and our public education system, preoccupied with political correctness and remote social goals, has become an international scandal with a drop of 80 points in the SAT scores of its best students.

Next we may well ask: Are all Americans deemed equal today – including, for example, Catholics? We all remember the conduct at Holy Cross Cathedral by a rowdy organization that subjected newly ordained priests and their families to verbal and physical abuse. We recall an invasion during a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral with members of the same organization screaming "bigot" and "murderer" at Cardinal O'Connor and spitting the Communion wafer on the floor.

What of the action of assistant attorneys general in Massachusetts who sought injunctions to prevent priests who had been arrested for protesting abortion from wearing their clerical garb in court? Have you ever heard of a similar effort directed against clergymen of other faiths?

The apparent license for Catholic bashing, however crude and offensive, leads us to ask: Do we still have a free press, or has it largely become the captive and servant of the counter culture? There is no suggestion here that the media are participants in a secret combination dedicated to promoting secular humanism at the expense of truth.

The explanation of media conduct, I submit, is simply that journalists – despite a posture of intellectual sophistication – tend to share a conditioned gullibility. The attitudes of journalists concerning religion have been researched. A glance at those attitudes would cause one to ask: Is it any wonder that the seeds of secular humanism flourish in such fallow ground?

It helps us understand, for example, why the *Boston Globe* in its report of the disorder at Holy Cross Cathedral did not tell its readers of the obscene parody of the Communion rite in which condoms were substituted for the host ... It did not tell that the Sermon on the Mount was mocked as an endorsement of sodomy ... It did not report the assaults or the simulated sex acts. Instead it described the event as a "colorful, loud and peaceful" demonstration.

The outrage at St. Patrick's Cathedral was celebrated in the film called "Stop the Church" which was aired by many public broadcasting stations from New York to Los Angeles.

A catalog for a painting exhibit financed by the National Endowment for the Arts described St. Patrick's as "that house of walking swastikas on Fifth Avenue." It referred to Cardinal O'Connor as a "fat cannibal" and a "creep in black skirts." The *New York Times* defended that as mere "critical opinion."

A week ago the press reported that Viacom had just completed an eight-billion dollar transaction that would make it the fifth largest media conglomerate in the world ... There was no mention of the fact that a TV station owned by Viacom in St. Louis recently hired a male prostitute and set him up in a luxury hotel suite... His assignment was to seek encounters with priests and identify any who might be interested in his services ... The room was wired for sound and there were taping facilities. The scheme was exposed, but the mere fact of its existence is evidential of the media's savagery toward the Church.

Personalities on a talk show on radio station WLUP-AM in Chicago suggested the Church should substitute slices of sausage for the Host and serve a "spicy body of Christ." They also proposed blackening the wafer and calling it "Cajun Jesus."

What would have been the reaction of the media if such acts

and abuse had been directed against the religious leaders and places of worship of Baptists or Episcopalians or Jews or Muslims or the orthodox Greek Church? There would – and quite properly – have been a storm of protest. But where Catholics are concerned the reaction is, in substance, that we are getting what we deserve. . because our clergy persist in commenting on morality.

Certainly Catholics are not alone in defense of objective standards. Devout members of other faiths are keepers of that flame. But the media are generally wary of frontal assaults on groups that have shown a propensity to fight back. Lay Catholics tend to remain incomprehensibly silent, which encourages the boldness of our detractors.

Thus:

- *Boston Globe* columnist Ellen Goodman writes that it is “the Catholic hierarchy” that has “opened the can of worms marked religion.”
- The *Boston Globe* deplores the fact that the Catholic Church urges Christians to boycott films that blaspheme Christ and the Mother of Jesus. The *Globe* proclaims, at least with respect to Catholics, that the First Amendment protects freedom to blaspheme apparently in preference to freedom of worship.
- *The Philadelphia Inquirer* issues a grim warning to Catholic Bishops who speak out against the thousands of daily abortions in our country. According to the *Inquirer* they risk “reawakening all the old religious fears and prejudices that once inflamed American politics” by “giving them substance” . . . in other words, by proving them to be well-founded!

Catholics are admonished to silence their opposition to sexual promiscuity – even though more Americans are dying of ordinary venereal diseases than from AIDS.

We are told to stop being “up tight” about sex education for third graders, the latter being a particular pet project of the new Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders, a practiced Catholic basher. Dr. Elders, speaking of our children, has said: “We taught them what to do in the front seat. Now it’s time to teach them what to do in the back seat.” And the message is that we had best get with that program.

The undeniable fact that parochial schools have spectacularly out-performed public schools is treated as a fault rather than a virtue. Jack Grier, a leader of the public school teachers lobby in Pennsylvania, speaking in opposition to school choice, proclaimed: “If the Catholic Church were to cease to exist and disappear today, it would be better for all of us.”

The illustrations are endless – sad, shoddy, at times scatological, not infrequently sinister. The teachings of our Church are ridiculed in every form of communication ... in newspapers ... on radio and television ... and from magazines, motion pictures and stage shows – on and off Broadway – to the costumes worn by the woman who calls herself Madonna.

There is no point in continuing the litany. I think the point is made.

And certainly there is nothing new about Catholic bashing. It runs like an ugly stain through the fabric of our history. But in the past it was aimed at closing Catholic Churches and burning down nunneries. That is not the case now .

What is new – what is particularly sinister – about current anti-Catholic bigotry is that it is stunningly different today in both substance and purpose. It is no longer aimed at coercing Catholics to abandon their Church – the purpose now is to force the Church to abandon Catholicism.

The Church is told it must change its doctrine on abortion. It must relax its teachings on sexual behavior. It must redefine its concepts of sin. It must restructure its clergy. It must

even make substantive changes in its prayers.

Above all, we are told, Pope John Paul must stop repeating the millennia-old teachings of the Church and must reshape them to appeal to alleged demographics – like the script of a television soap opera. But even the silence that the secular humanists and their allies would impose on Catholics is selective:

Note that those who describe themselves as Catholics – but who look to manipulated opinion polls or noisy activists for their position on faith and morals – are quoted prominently and with respect.

Note that the media – including specifically the *Boston Globe* – actually welcome the statements of our Bishops when they are supportive of the views of the media ... such as when they oppose the death penalty or call for a nuclear freeze or criticize certain economic programs.

Only when our Bishops criticize secular humanism, only when they dare trespass into sacrosanct precincts such as abortion or socially engineered education, are they told to stop trying to impose their views on society.

To support this assault on the fundamentals of Catholic faith, the media exploit the myth of Catholic rebellion. Never was this fantasy more garishly proclaimed than in the fortnight preceding the Pope's arrival in Denver: The media reported that American Catholics were rising against their Church. They were rejecting its authority. They considered the Pope hopelessly out of touch with the real world. The campaign was even given a name – "Days of Dissent."- The fiction was based on manipulated polls where the shape of the question evoked answers that could be, and were, used to distort.

It was based on renegade priests and so-called escaped nuns who were trotted out by the media to bear false witness to the alleged schism.

It was based on the testimony of so-called dissidents such as Frances Kissling, President of something called Catholics for a Free Choice. She has since admitted – under questioning – that she is the only member of her organization. But that was after she had been presented as the voice for a substantial flock of disenchanted Catholics.

It has also been revealed that the fraudulent front – “Catholics for a Free Choice” – is financed by the likes of Hugh Hefner, publisher of Playboy, and such organizations as Planned Parenthood and the contraceptive industry.

In the week prior to the Pope’s arrival a sparse collection of publicity seekers – perhaps 100 in all – appeared in Denver. They were identified as the vanguard of aroused Catholics who were headed in huge numbers for that mile-high city to turn the occasion into the “Days of Dissent.” There were some interesting views expressed:

One speaker told the cameras she belonged to a group of Catholic women who worshipped nature and pagan gods as well as the Church’s more conventional objects of veneration.

One man said he loved the Church – loved its music, candles and stained-glass windows – and that it was only its dogma that he rejected.

The media, giving respectful prominence to such views, predicted the Pope would arrive with messages of compromise in the position of the Church to placate the battalions of irate American Catholics converging on Denver.

But we know that rebel army never appeared. Instead, the handful of self-styled dissidents simply vanished. We saw them replaced by hundreds of thousands of devout Catholics, most of whom were teenagers who had driven, flown and even hitchhiked . . . to see and hear their Pope – to express their love for him and their fealty to his message.

The *Denver Post*, which had joined in the “Days of Dissent” forecast, estimated, in an apparent state of shock, that the faithful outnumbered dissidents 4000 to one. But when it assigned a reporter to collect critical quotes from the young people in attendance, he reported he had been unable to find even that one.

Who among us can ever forget that visitation of Pope John Paul? From the moment he arrived at the airport – when he stood in the rain, and urged everyone to choose life and aspire to morality – it was evident to the stunned media that he was undaunted. The immediate reaction of the press was, at least implicitly, to rebuke him for not moderating his remarks to avoid embarrassing any of the political figures who were on hand for the photo opportunity.

But that was the dying whimper of the “Days of Dissent” nonsense. That myth was totally exposed by the adoring half-million who attended his Mass and the estimated three billion who watched it on television around the world.

His powerful presence and his reaffirmation of the teachings of the Church brought joy to American Catholics, but did not really surprise any of us.

Mighty empires, those of Rome, of the Nazis, of the Soviets – with all their power, all their instruments of torture and coercion – had sought desperately to crush that faith . . . and had failed. They are gone. All of them are gone. But the faith remains, powerful and strong as truth itself.

Which brings me to where I began: It is not our faith that can be destroyed by the anti-Catholicism of secular humanists. It is our nation, as it was conceived and dedicated by our forefathers, that is at risk.

That, I suggest, was what Pope John Paul was telling us.

Let us hope the message was heard.

Let us hope that Americans, of whatever faith, recognized in Denver the epitaph of Woodstock. And let us hope those unforgettable seventy-two hours will bring a reawakening to standards of decency ... self-discipline ... conscience – to the objective morality for which our society hungers.

I thank you.

CROSSING THE LINE

From My Viewpoint

by Cardinal John O'Connor

According to Ray Kerrison of the *New York Post* (Sept. 27, 1993), Mr. Bill Donohue has written a letter to Mayor Dinkins about the almost unbelievable ad plastered on the sides of city buses, public property. The ad presents Madonna, whom Mr. Kerrison calls “the pop freak who peddles blasphemy and lewdness with her muse,” side by side with Mary and the Infant Jesus. The caption runs vertically between the two: “VH-1, The Difference Between You and Your Parents.” VH-1, I’m told, is a sister network of MTV .

Who is Mr. Bill Donohue? He is the President of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. The *Post* column says that his letter to the mayor demands “that the offensive work be removed from public property and those responsible for its distribution be disciplined.” The letter reads, in part:

“This is especially egregious, A bus is government property. No one is permitted to put any religious symbol on government property. If we tried to put a picture of Our Blessed Mother and Jesus on the side of a bus, it would be rejected because

it would be endorsing a religion. But if it is used with Madonna in a form of blasphemy, it is acceptable. Suddenly, it becomes freedom of speech. The double standard is an outrage."

Now that's a clever argument. It turns the argument about separation of Church and State upside down, right on its head. Is there anyone who can not hear the scream all over town should the MTA carry a poster of Mary and the Infant Jesus alone, saying something like: "Here are the woman and child your parents reverence. Why don't you? "

Mr. Donohue is quite within his rights, as well, to ask if the MTA would accept similar advertising if it ridiculed religious faiths other than Catholic, or individuals of color, or persons with AIDS. Huge numbers of fair-minded and decent people of every religious persuasion ride MTA buses. I can not imagine that they will not deluge MTA officials and/or the mayor's office with letters of outrage. Christians and Muslims alike share reverence of Mary and the Infant, and the Anti-Defamation League has a fine record of protesting outrage against religious beliefs, in general, Jewish or other. Surely the New York Civil Liberties Union will see and protest the violation of the principle of separation of Church and State, one of the union's consistent concerns.

Indeed, I can speak from experience. During the summer, the rightfully revered Rabbi Morris Sherer, president, Agudath Israel of America, nationwide Orthodox Jewish movement, took serious exception to MTA's indecent commercial advertising policy. I was not surprised. Rabbi Sherer and I have consistently shared the same moral values. If anything, he has been even more watchful than I, and unfailingly courageous. Mr. David Zweibel is in-house general counsel to Agudath Israel. I have never seen clearer or more persuasive briefs, particularly on Church-State constitutional issues, than those written by Mr. Zweibel. In my judgment Mr. Zweibel's analysis of the MTA policy leaves that policy without a leg to stand on. In short, MTA officials can argue all they want that the

right of free speech requires them to accept indecent commercial advertising. I agree with Mr. Zweibel: it categorically does not. It's a smoke-screen to claim that it does.

Sometimes we Catholics think we're alone when we wage these battles. Frequently I find Rabbi Sherer way ahead of me. And there are many more on the same side.

So I feel quite confident that fair people will insist that fairness be exercised by the MTA.

Now having said all this, and despite the gravity of the offense on the part of VH-1 and the MTA, I have to recognize at the same time the highly favorable publicity being given to Mary and the Infant Jesus!

Can the real Madonna and Child lose when compared with the *ersatz*? Surely a number of young people will view the ad, not as showing the difference between themselves and their parents, but the difference between falsehood and truth. And surely a number of the young, middle-aged and elderly will thank God for the wisdom of their parents! Even more: lots and lots of people I know, young and old, and many more whom I don't know, will undoubtedly be infuriated by an ad that suggests that their values are those of the *ersatz* Madonna. And who knows what standing next to the *real* Madonna, if only in an ad, may do for Madonna herself! It's the risk you run when you post an ad on the side of a bus. Sometimes buses backfire.

Incidentally, those who may know or discover that the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights rents space in our Archdiocesan Catholic Center, 1011 First Avenue, New York, NY 10022, may wonder why I have to read in the *Post* a letter to the mayor from the League's president. Why didn't I just go down a couple of flights to his office and ask to see the letter? One good reason: I didn't know about it. Contrary to

the myth of the cynics, lots of Catholics do lots of things without asking my permission (thank the good Lord). An even more important reason: I wouldn't want anyone to be able to accuse me of violating the separation of Church and State by trying to influence a letter a Catholic agency wanted to write to a public official! We Catholics have to be awfully careful not to cross the line, you know.

This column by Cardinal O'Connor was published in the September 30, 1993 issue of Catholic New York, the Archdiocesan weekly. It is reprinted here with permission.

A CALL TO ACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

By Karen Lynn Krugh

In late September, for over two days, the city of New York was rocked by the protests of the Catholic League. Hardly a television or radio station missed the story. It was hot stuff. Religion and sex always sells, doesn't it?

As you now know, the Catholic League was successful in having the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and New York Telephone remove offensive ads for VH-1 from city buses and telephone booths. The ad featured a picture of the pop singer Madonna opposite an image of the Virgin Mary holding the Infant Jesus.

How does that comparison sit with you? How about the words emblazoned down the center of the ad – “VH-1, The Difference Between You and Your Parents”?

Is that true? It's not for me, and it's not true for most of

my friends, either.

The VH-1 ad is inexcusable for many reasons. Here are but a few: 1) It promotes division between generations. In a society straining under the burden of broken homes, adultery, divorce, abuses and other assorted ills which many attribute to the breakdown of traditional nuclear families, why would VH-1 want to negatively promote differences between generations?

2) It holds up Madonna Ciccone as a model for our generation. Sure, compared to Madonna, we'd all look like angels, but wouldn't you rather be associated with the Queen of Heaven than the queen of obscenity?

3) It says that it's okay, even cool, to blaspheme a religious symbol. According to some, the display of any religious symbol on public property is inherently offensive. But why should we protect the sensitivities of those who don't believe and not those who do?

I hope those of you who are in the New York area and who saw the ad were outraged and moved to action. For the rest of you, all I can say is that Catholic bashing will surely rear its ugly head somewhere near you in the not too distant future.

Many young people are quite willing to take up a cause and let their voices be heard. But are we this militant when it comes to defending our faith? We fight when it affects our pocketbooks or the environment. Why not our church? Are we embarrassed, or perhaps afraid to take up what we think may be a lonely battle? I know through my work with youth and young adult groups in my parish that we can make a difference and we will take action if we have direction and strong leadership. Let the numbers, the support and the swell of enthusiasm still reverberating through America from the Holy Father's visit at World Youth Day energize you. Let those who attend your CCD, CYO, Youth Group, Young Adult group or your church energize you. Let the forceful action of adults energize you.

I've been with the Catholic League just two months now and I can't believe how much work we have to do. And that's a sad reflection on American society today. If the defaming of the Catholic Church and the attempts to restrict or suspend the religious and civil rights of Catholics were not so common and acceptable, I would have a lighter workload. Unfortunately, I don't and so I appeal to youth.

The Catholic League is looking to increase youth and young adult involvement both in the League and in anti-defamation causes around the country. Write to me and I'll send you information on the latest action the League has taken to fight discrimination against Catholics. I'll also send along membership information. In the meantime, keep your eyes and ears open to things in your area that you find offensive as Catholics. Become pro-active in your faith. Write letters to the editor. Don't be afraid to stand up for the church, just make sure you know the argument before you commit yourself. Pope John Paul II told us in Denver that we should not be ashamed of the Gospel, or of our faith. Will you listen to him?

Write to me: Karen Lynn Krugh, Executive Assistant, The Catholic League, 1011 First Avenue, New York, NY 10022

The Popularity of Depravity

There is every sign that we are living in a society that suffers from an acute case of cultural schizophrenia. Survey research discloses that the American people worry about the future of the nation, citing the social disintegration that is upon us. Separation, divorce, illegitimacy, AIDS, homicide, suicide, drugs – you've all heard the litany before. But at

the same time the American people seem to have an insatiable appetite for cultural shock. How else does one understand the phenomenal success of Madonna, "Demolition Man," Howard Stern and "Bevis & Butthead"?

Madonna needs the least introduction. Suffice it to say that this "singer's" fame is largely contingent upon her willingness to prostitute herself before her audiences while she "performs." Surrounded by nude dancers, Madonna finds it almost impossible to do a number without some sexually explicit message (and she is not above using children in her acts). "Demolition Man" is a violent movie that stars Sylvester Stallone, an actor who now finds it necessary to appear nude in order to sell his movies. It is the number one box office hit of the fall season.

Howard Stern is a disc jockey turned author. Known almost exclusively for his delight in beckoning FCC lawsuits (there is nothing so vulgar that Stern won't say on the air), Stern's new book reveals his desire to be there when supermodel Cindy Crawford "gets into a disfiguring car accident." The book sold a record 850,000 copies the first week it was released. "Bevis & Butthead" is an MTV cartoon that features two teenage buffoons who indulge in violence and women. The show was recently moved to a late-evening time slot after a 5-year-old set his home on fire, killing his 2-year-old sister. The boy, you see, got the bright idea of lighting an aerosol spray from "Bevis & Butt-head." The show was the highest rated program on the network.

So what we have is the most famous female pop singer of our time, the number one movie of the fall season, the best selling book in America and the highest rated TV show on the MTV network-all co-existing in a society that claims to be very troubled by the degree of violence and reckless sex that the entertainment industry sports. Like children, we seem to want it all. We want the experience of pleasure seekers without the social consequences that such pursuits entail. And

like children, we seem to learn the hard way.

Not until an innocent child is killed do we learn the insanity of our actions, and even then it is questionable what has been learned.

It is certainly true that we reap what we sow. Parents who fail to monitor the culture of their children are as delinquent as Hollywood producers. Even more so, as they cannot claim to be motivated by greed: theirs is a failure of passivity, of resignation, of family neglect. When Jesse Jackson recently instructed black parents to turn off the TV each night for three hours, he was on to something that has no color or class boundary. Just as drinking from a sewer has deadly effects, indulging in video vileness touches all who are exposed.

The real problem is that even those who do not partake of today's cultural excesses are at risk morally. Sociologically speaking, there is no such thing as what John Stuart Mill called "self-regarding" acts, i.e., acts which effect only the behavior of the actor. We do not live in solitaire, we live in society, ergo, what we think, what we feel and what we do ineluctably affects someone else. It is philosophical rubbish to suggest otherwise.

There is one saving grace in all of this: the shock value that Madonna, "Demolition Man," Howard Stern and "Beavis & Butt-head" afford is a tribute to the resiliency of a moral code that still allows for shock. And that, make no mistake about it, is more a tribute to the resiliency of the Catholic Church than any other source of moral authority.

After all, when the pundits are looking to interview someone who is likely to object to the latest example of moral depravity, whom do they call? They don't call the Episcopalians, Presbyterians or Methodists. No, they call the Catholics. And with good reason: despite some internal

discord, the Catholic Church remains the last best bastion of moral authority left in our society. For that we can all be grateful.

L.A. company apologizes to Catholics for accepting anti-Catholic billboards

A Los Angeles company which owns thousands of outdoor advertising billboards in southern California has apologized to area Catholics for carrying anti-Catholic advertising sponsored by a breakaway group of Seventh Day Adventists.

Tod Tamberg, editor of *The Tidings*, the colorful weekly of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, thanked the *Catholic League Newsletter* for bringing the story to his attention. He sent along a copy of the letter of apology from John C. Martin, CEO of Gannett Outdoor of Southern California, owner of the billboards on which the ads appeared.

The *League Newsletter* (July-August issue) published a photo of the offending billboard taken by California Executive Director Ted Mayer and included member reports of similar billboards in other locales across the country.

The Tidings article generated calls and letters to the company which in turn led to the apology.

Yet another letter of apology, this one addressed to Cardinal Roger Mahony, came from Bjarne Christensen, President of the Southern California Conference of Seventh Day Adventists. He noted that the leader of Barn Ministries, the group placing

the billboards, had been “disfellowshipped from our denomination.”

Officials at Gannett promised to be more vigilant in the future in screening out anti-Catholic messages.

The offensive billboard ad featured a cartoon image of a smiling Pope John Paul II with the legend, “The bible says: The number of the beast is the number of a man.”

This incident and its resolution is another example of what can be accomplished when Catholics stand up and protest anti-Catholic bigotry.

Non-sectarian Protestant school backed in teacher hiring discrimination suit

League joins brief

The Catholic League has joined the Christian Legal Society and others in filing a friend of the court brief asking the United States Supreme Court to review a decision of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals which ruled that a Protestant school cannot refuse to hire a non-Protestant who inquired about a teaching position.

In narrowly construing Section 702 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the court effectively nullified an exemption from the statute’s ban on religious discrimination in employment. The exemption was intended by Congress to protect religious educational institutions.

The background facts of the case are clear and straightforward. Kamehameha is a religiously oriented school in Hawaii which is operated under the terms of a non-profit charitable trust; the trust requires that the trustees and teachers of the school be Protestant.

When a non-Protestant who wished to teach at the school was informed of the schools' Protestant-only requirement for teachers, she filed a discrimination charge against Kamehameha with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The EEOC rejected the schools' defense that it was a religious educational institution under Section 702 and, therefore, permitted to discriminate on the basis of religion in its hiring of teachers. The EEOC filed suit in federal district court alleging Kamekameka's conduct in failing to hire a non-Protestant violated Title VII's ban on religious discrimination in employment.

The court disagreed, ruling that Kamehameha was entitled to a religious educational exemption under Section 702. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the district court and held that Section 702 must be narrowly construed, available "only [to] those institutions with extremely close ties to organized religion."

Under this ruling, which runs counter to decisions of two other circuit courts which have examined the issue, an organization can claim a religious exemption under Section 702 only if the court determines that the institution is "primarily religious," but not if the court determines it is "primarily secular."

In urging the Supreme Court to review this decision, the League argues that if the decision of the Ninth Circuit is allowed to stand, the result will be a "severe erosion of the autonomy of religious bodies in determining their own policies, articulating their own voices, and pursuing their own paths free from needless governmental intervention in

their affairs.”

As the brief points out, the right to hire faculty members who share common religious beliefs and convictions is essential if religious schools are to carry out their educational mission. Not only would the decision of the court of appeals significantly burden this right, it would result in an excessive entanglement of government in religious matters.

League supports Massachusetts pair in “rental discrimination” suit

The Catholic League has filed a friend of the court brief with the Massachusetts Supreme Court in support of Catholic brothers who were sued for discrimination because they refused to rent an apartment to a unmarried heterosexual couple.

The brothers, Paul and Ronald Desilets, declined to rent their apartment to a cohabiting couple because they believed that to do so would be facilitating sin.

The Catholic League decided to speak out in this case because it involves the critical issue of weighing the rights of conscience against the mandates of anti-discrimination law. This is the first time the state’s high court has examined the question, and the court’s decision will have wide ranging consequences for the people of Massachusetts.

The brief argues that the Desilets are protected in their decision by the strong language in the Massachusetts constitution supporting the right of religious conscience. The

Supreme Court of Massachusetts has interpreted the free exercise provision of the state constitution to mean that the “people of Massachusetts have absolute freedom in their religious practices subject only to preservation of public peace, the worship rights of others and the general obligation of good citizenship.”

In a balancing of interests, the brief states, the constitutional right to free exercise of religious conscience takes precedence over the right of unmarried cohabiting couples to be free from marital status discrimination. Although marital status is a protected class under Massachusetts housing anti-discrimination law, unmarried cohabitation is not accorded the same weight as marriage in Massachusetts domestic relations and property law. There is, therefore, no justification for giving unmarried cohabitation equal status in anti-discrimination law.

Other groups signing the brief include the Christian Legal Society, Seventh-day Adventists, Concerned Women for America, Massachusetts Catholic Conference and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Freedom and moral truth must go hand in hand

by Robert Royal

If you get your news about the pope from the American press, you would probably guess that *Veritatis Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth), John Paul’s encyclical on morality which appeared earlier this month is all about sex. In the media, the Vatican is almost always portrayed as obsessed with sex – and a

country that has produced Madonna, "Basic Instinct," Heidi Fleiss and homosexual bath houses has a certain familiarity with sexual obsessions. But if you read the encyclical for the juicy parts you are going to be disappointed. There are only one or two brief sentences on sex in 179 pages. John Paul is after bigger game.

The pope knows that freedom is the wave of the present and future, and he believes freedom properly understood, is at the heart of a Christian understanding of the human person. What many people in contemporary America may find scandalous in this encyclical is that John Paul believes authentic freedom can only exist when it participates in moral truth.

We are so used to the half-truth that you should make up your own mind about right and wrong that we forget figures like Adolph Hitler and Charles Manson, two notable examples of moral self-determination. Ultimately, we do all have to make our own moral choices. The pope reminds us though, that unformed consciences operating in the skeptical atmosphere of this century have often led to disaster.

Americans once understood that truth – moral truth – is the very basis of freedom. We are in crisis on many fronts because we have lost that understanding. The Founders were not ashamed to write "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." The American Jesuit John Courtney Murray has said this affirms three things: There are truths, we can know them, and we – we Americans – hold them because they undergird our liberty as a society and our dignity as human beings.

John Paul could not agree more, and warns that those who think skepticism and relativism protect democracy will quickly find their nations not only in crisis, but in bondage. Where there is no truth as a standard, power will impose order.

As a pastor, the pope naturally has aims in this encyclical that go beyond politics. He also wants to restore another kind

of freedom: the freedom of the human person from all slavery, internal as well as external. To do that, he believes, requires saying some acts are always simply wrong. John Paul was a moral theologian before he became a bishop and fully understands how complex ethical judgments may be. But he clearly wants to restate some simple truths; we already have enough complexities.

For example, we've grown used to the language of therapy in which virtually all relationships are described in terms of "co-dependency." We also talk of "recovering" from addictions to everything from alcohol and drugs to love and religion. Some of these therapies, of course, free people from slavery to habit.

But John Paul points out that psychological and sociological categories only take us so far. Even freed from irrational compulsions, we still face the old human questions: How are we to live; what is right and wrong, and what is the meaning of our existence? We become free, healthy, fully human, only when we recognize the "splendor" of deep religious and moral truths.

Recent sexual ethics worry the pope both for their own sake and for what they say about our notions of responsibility. He quotes Saint Paul: "You were called to freedom brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another." After the sexual revolution – and the epidemic of divorce, illegitimacy, child abuse and sexually transmitted disease – a gentle reminder of some home truths about sexuality might seem welcome.

But current sexual morality is ridiculed with rationalizations. Therefore, John Paul is accused of not only sexual obsession, but of a "rigid" sexual ethic. The pope's position was, and in many cases still is, of course, also the teaching of many Protestants and Jews who try to follow Biblical norms on faith and morals.

John Paul addresses this letter specifically to Catholic bishops around the world. He believes some bishops and theologians have contributed to current moral confusion. (Dissent within all the religious groups has introduced doubts about fundamental teaching that were unquestioned until just a short time ago.) In particular, the pope warns against several modern ethical schools that look only at intentions, or the good to derive from a bad act, or the proportion of good to evil. These are sincere efforts at moral reasoning but can never justify anything that is wrong per se. Catholic institutions – colleges, hospitals, welfare agencies, even seminaries – that deny this are not Catholic, and bishops should remove the Catholic name to avoid confusion.

This request will no doubt be the most controversial part of the encyclical. We are so pluralistic that we think even Catholic institutions should not be Catholic – or bother very much about truth.

As Americans, we all profess deep respect for the rights of conscience. But if John Paul is right, we are reaping the consequences of a one-sided emphasis on an absolute self-determination that neglects truth. The pope quotes the great English convert John Henry Newman to remind us of the other half of the moral dynamic: "Conscience has rights because it has duties."

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Pennsylvania bishops defend tax-exempt status of charities

In response to attempts by local taxing authorities to challenge (sometimes successfully) the tax-exempt status of religious and other public charities in Pennsylvania, the state's bishops have issued a call to action. After outlining the splendid work done by various charitable agencies and institutions sponsored by the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania, the bishops' statement calls on charitable organizations, legislators and citizens to work toward a resolution of the problem.

The figures cited in the statement are impressive. Catholic Charities in Pennsylvania provide services to over 1 million people each year. There are 34 Catholic nursing homes in the state, 27 Catholic hospitals and 25 Catholic colleges and universities educating more than 75,000 students annually. According to the bishops, Catholic elementary and secondary schools educate 250,000 children, at a savings to the public school districts of Pennsylvania of 1 billion dollars each year.

The bishops note that these institutions, along with other charitable organizations operating in the state have a common denominator – they serve Pennsylvanians, enhancing citizens' lives in many diverse ways and saving taxpayers the millions of dollars it would cost the state to undertake provision of these services.

One of the difficulties identified by the bishops is the present confusing standard for charitable organizations which currently exists in Pennsylvania.

“Decisions in the courts have not been consistent in

determining what an organization must do to be tax-exempt," the bishops declare, "and litigation has given rise to conflicting rulings statewide. Local taxing bodies have then applied these rulings, often resulting in uneven tax burdens."

The bishops, therefore, call on charitable organizations to "inform the public of the good they do," the citizens of Pennsylvania to support legislation that would establish clear criteria for charitable institutions and the Pennsylvania General Assembly to acknowledge that support and to act upon it.

Finally, the bishops urge the governor and the legislature "to recognize anew the critical value of charitable organizations in Pennsylvania, and to protect and strengthen their mission by continuing to exempt them from taxation."

This is a timely message. Other dioceses and religious groups are experiencing similar pressure from taxing authorities bent on pursuing the short-sighted policy of increasing revenues at the expense of charitable organizations.