

A “HAIL MARY” WE PROTESTED

It is not unusual for football game announcers to declare last-minute desperation passes “Hail Mary” passes. But in a preseason game between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Pittsburgh Steelers, a Philadelphia announcer on Fox channel WTXF got carried away when tried to become creative. Here’s what he said: “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Please come up and catch this for me.”

In our complaint, we stressed that the reason why we have never protested the invocation of a “Hail Mary” pass is because the league does not want to overreact. This incident, however, was different and our concern is that “if this were to become commonplace, then the stage would be set for real insult.”

We expect that after we hear from the station we will not have to deal with this issue again.

This advertisement appeared in the Op-Ed section of the New York Times on October 27, 1996.

CONGRATULATIONS, HOLY FATHER

For Catholics, November 1 is All Saints Day. Appropriately, this November 1 is also the 50th anniversary of Pope John Paul II’s ordination to the priesthood. So beloved is he that many

are already calling him John Paul the Great.

What makes this pope so special is that he is the greatest moral teacher of the twentieth century. Unlike politicians scrambling for votes, Pope John Paul II does not tailor his teachings to fit the latest ideological trends. Unlike other world leaders, he does not seek to time his words to the meter of elite opinion. And unlike other moral teachers, he does not waver in his commitment to God's law.

Still, some demur. Why doesn't Pope John Paul II get with the times and abandon "unfashionable" Church teachings about sex and the sanctity of human life?

Freedom, as Pope John Paul II has said, means the right to do what we ought; it does not mean the right to always do as we want. That's a tough sell in a world where "happiness" is identified with indulging every appetite—no matter how depraved. But it remains true: a concept of liberty that allows for the killing of innocents and the liberation of the libido is *aperversion* of freedom.

"Let your conscience be your guide" is a popular refrain. It was also popular with every butcher in the twentieth century, from Hitler to Jeffrey Dahmer. Pope John Paul II knows better: there is a profound difference between a well-formed conscience and a conscience grounded in self-interest.

The Holy Father succeeds because he rises above reigning ideologies by proclaiming eternal truths. And he is loved by millions precisely because they find in him the greatest moral resource on earth. His legacy will be as emulated as it will be lasting, and that is why he will be known as John Paul the Great.

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS ON THE JOB

In 1992, Kathleen Pielech and Patricia Reed were fired from Raynham-Taunton Greyhound Park for absenting themselves on Christmas Day. In an amicus brief two years ago, the Catholic League argued that Pielech and Reed had their First Amendment right to religious freedom abridged by this action. The ACLU provided lead counsel to the two women.

This past August, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts struck down a law as constitutional that sought to give protection to people like Pielech and Reed. But now Governor William Weld and key state representatives have pursued a new law that would provide rights to person's of faith on the job. The bill was passed easily in the State House and now awaits passage in the Senate.

The Catholic League has contacted Gov. Weld, Lt. Gov. Paul Celluci, House Speaker Thomas Finneran, Attorney General Scott Harshbarger and Senate President Thomas Birmingham pledging its support. Gov. Weld wrote to Dr. Donohue thanking him for his support. A decision in the Senate is expected in January.

PENTAGON GAG RULE CHALLENGED

Kevin Hasson, president of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, has sued the Secretary of Defense and the heads of the Air Force, Army and Navy over the Pentagon edict that barred Catholic chaplains from asking Catholic armed services personnel to send postcards to their representatives requesting that they override President Clinton's veto of the partial-birth abortion bill. Hasson is representing Air Force Reserve chaplain Rev. Vincent Rigdon and others.

The Pentagon issued its gag rule after Catholic chaplains began to implement the wishes of the National Catholic Conference of Bishops. Hasson put his case succinctly by stating, "For the first time in the history of the republic, the federal government has told priests, ministers, rabbis and imams, under threat of criminal prosecution, what they may and may not preach. This is an outrage that cannot go unchallenged."

The Catholic League joined the protest when the gag rule was implemented and is delighted that the Becket Fund is now pursuing this matter in the courts.

THE POLITICS OF PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION

The victory in the House of Representatives in overriding President Clinton's veto of the bill banning partial-birth abortions (285-137) was unfortunately not upheld in the Senate (the vote of 57-41 was nine short of the necessary two-thirds needed to override the President's veto). What was just as horrendous as the Senate vote was the politics that accompanied it.

We were repeatedly told by abortion rights advocates that "only" about 500 partial-birth abortions occurred each year. But that myth was forever shattered when the *Record* of Bergen County, New Jersey disclosed that at least 1,500 partial-birth abortions were performed each year in one New Jersey clinic alone!

Besides the vote, the league objected to the way the media and the politicians exploited the Catholic angle to this issue.

For example, both Boston newspapers, the *Globe* and the *Herald*, refused to carry ads placed by the Archdiocese of Boston that depicted partial-birth abortions. Yet neither newspaper has ever had any problem with Planned Parenthood's well-financed ads. So much for equal time.

And then there was the constant citing of Catholic women who have had a partial-birth abortion. The *Boston Herald*, for instance, ran a story on September 20 that mentioned in its text, and in a statement below a picture, that Maureen Britell is a Catholic who underwent the procedure.

This raises the question whether is it commonplace in newspapers to identify the religious affiliation of those who don't subscribe to the teachings of their religion. Surely there are women and men in all religious communities who openly defy the tenets of their faith, yet this is typically not deemed newsworthy. But exceptions, it seems, are made when the subject is abortion: Catholic participation never fails to go unnoticed.

Even worse is the handling of this issue by politicians. Sen. Barbara Boxer of California actually cited the case of Maureen Britell from the Senate floor, making certain to mention Britell's Catholic status. Then, in a rather revealing comment, Sen. Boxer said that after the partial-birth abortion was completed, Mr. and Mrs. Britell "named their daughter Dahlia. She had a Catholic funeral and is buried at Otis Air Force Base in Cape Cod, MA." Sen. Boxer and the Britell's need to explain why "blob's" are accorded funerals.

POTTERY BARN RESPONDS

In last month's *Catalyst*, we reported that "Pottery Barn" published a catalog with a miniature drawing of a nude woman posed in a Christ-like crucified position hanging over a bed. The explanation that Williams-Sonoma, the parent company, offered satisfies our concerns. The executive vice president, Pat Connolly, is a good Catholic who simply did not catch the offensive depiction and regrets its publication.

SEX AND PRIESTS, ONE MORE TIME

In the September edition of *New Jersey* magazine there was an interview with Church-suing attorney Stephen Rubino. The league's response was to once again correct common misperceptions about this issue.

Rubino says that author Richard Sipe found that 6 percent of priests were pedophiles. Wrong. What Sipe said was that 6 percent of priests had such **tendencies**. Now tendencies and actual behavior are not identical, and both Sipe and Rubino know this. Beyond that, it is not clear how one measures tendencies toward anything. Yet this nonsense is bandied about by Rubino to make his case against the Church.

Rubino also errs in charging that wayward priests are simply sent to other parishes. There was some of that in the 1980s, but the National Catholic Conference of Bishops has taken steps to deal more effectively with this problem in the 1990s. And as recent editions of *Catalyst* have shown, the incidence

of pedophilia in the Protestant clergy is greater than the level among Catholic priests.

Rubino was the attorney who took the case of Steven Cook against Cardinal Bernardin. Cook exonerated Cardinal Bernardin before dying of AIDS (his “seeing and feeling memory” was, on later reflection, not very clear to him) yet Rubino gets off easy in this interview with Stephen Barr because Barr never presses Rubino on this issue.

Bishop McHugh of Camden, New Jersey is mentioned in the article for his readiness to fight attorney’s like Rubino. It is to his credit that Bishop McHugh does not simply lie down and let the likes of Rubino walk all over him. We have seen too many priests unfairly maligned by the Rubino’s of this world to let that happen again.

If a priest is guilty of wrongdoing, he should be held accountable. The same goes for those who engage in overkill in their pursuit of “justice.”

HOWARD STERN’S SENSE OF HUMOR

Howard Stern, the radio talk show host, never fails to attack Catholicism. On September 24, he was at it again, this time slamming all priests. Referring to priests as “fakes” preoccupied with abortion, Stern opined “Meanwhile they’re out getting oral sex from guys.”

He continued like this charging that if all unborn children (he prefers the term “fetuses”) were aborted, “there will be less targets” for priests. “Where you goin’ to find fifteen year olds?”

Stern is not only offensive, he's anti-Catholic. He once apologized to Latinos for making anti-Hispanic remarks, but has yet to apologize to Catholics.

VICTORY ON LONG ISLAND

The league's Long Island chapter has successfully concluded its dispute with Winthrop-University Hospital in Mineola, New York.

During the 1995 Christmas season, the Long Island board was notified that a hospital employee was summarily terminated after objecting to a display on hospital bulletin boards of a distasteful cartoon depiction of the Holy Family. Long Island chapter president Chuck Mansfield and attorney Frank Schroeder, a chapter board member, immediately notified the hospital that the league would not stand idly by in the face of such a discriminatory decision.

Mansfield subsequently met and otherwise communicated with hospital officials, as a result of which the league does not anticipate similar situations at this hospital in the future. While the terminated employee did not wish reinstatement and quickly became re-employed elsewhere, Winthrop agreed to provide him with lost wages during the period of his unemployment, as well as to accept his letter of resignation and rescind his termination.