

# Self-serving media study denies religious bias

by Patrick Riley

A nationally heralded report that aims at “bridging the gap” between religion and the news media features a dismissive critique of a similar study sponsored by the Catholic League and the Knights of Columbus (*Media Coverage of the Catholic Church*) and chalks up perceived bias as simply lack of knowledge on the part of reporters.

According to the report, titled “Bridging the Gap: Religion and the News Media,” *Media Coverage of the Catholic Church* is “not convincing,” and merely articulates “what traditional Catholics dislike about news coverage of Catholic controversies.”

“Bridging the Gap” was published by the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, which has behind it a three-quarter *billion* dollar fund established by presslord Frank E. Gannett, who died in 1957. The fund is administered by the Freedom Forum, chaired by Al Neuharth. Neuharth, founder of *USA Today* is a self-styled “S.O.B.” who portrays himself in his autobiography (*Confessions of an S.O.B.*) as a Machiavellian moral scofflaw.

The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center is chaired by John Seigenthaler, a former subordinate of Neuharth’s at *USA Today* who provides the study’s introduction. The report was written by John Dart, a religious affairs reporter at the Los Angeles Times, and Dr. Jimmy R. Allen, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Allen was on the losing side of a struggle that brought traditionalists into control of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Allen and Dart fail to make clear just why they adjudge the

League's media study "not convincing." Despite their emphatic if subjective conclusion, the only criticism of their own that they offer is that the study "makes no note of the key role of religion writers in the stories analyzed by that study." But they do not show that religion writers played the role they claim for them, or what that role would signify.

They offer no analysis, no reasons of their own for the League study's failure to convince. Rather they uncritically echo remarks made by others. They make no mention of the study's methodology, far less analyze it or even describe it. Strictly speaking, their critique does not justify any conclusion whatsoever.

With poetic symmetry, the Dart-Allen study reaches conclusions favorable to the industry that sponsored it, however remotely, namely the press media. On the basis of a survey whose actual questionnaire they do not reveal, it declares that "an anti-religious bias in the media is a myth." With the finding that 72 percent of journalists surveyed say religion is meaningful in their lives, it confronts a widely quoted survey of the media elites published in 1981 by S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman (Dr. Lichter happens to have been the director and author of the Catholic League – Knights of Columbus study!).

That earlier study found that fifty percent of those in the media fail to name a religious affiliation and only eight percent admit to going to church or synagogue weekly.

The First Amendment Center's survey was broader than the Lichter-Rothman poll because it reached out to include local newspapers and churches, but it went only to journalists to write about religion. Lichter- Rothman, on the other hand, limited their survey to a much smaller number of media elite who influence the nation's major electronic and print media.

All of this is not to imply that the Dart-Allen survey has no

merit. It brings some important truths to the fore. But it is gravely defective, not only because of its factual mistakes and methodological errors but for philosophical reasons, such as when it repeatedly counterposes the media's preoccupation with "facts" and religion's concern with "faith" – as though faith cannot deal in facts, and as though religion has nothing to do with morals. Far from "Bridging the Gap," this study widens it.

The First Amendment Center report needs a thorough, painstaking revision, and the Catholic League will be happy to help.

*Dr. Patrick Riley is Catholic League Director of Research.*

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# The Christian Coalition Conference

**by Karen Lynn Krugh**

*In August she reported from Denver. This past month we find Karen Lynn Krugh reporting from the Christian Coalition conference in Washington.*

For two days in September, over 2,000 members of the Christian Coalition descended on Washington, D.C. for their third annual conference. Far from being a gathering solely of Pat Robertson devotees, the group counts Catholics, mainline and Evangelical Protestants, Jews and others among its members and supporters. Catholic League President Bill Donohue and I attended the conference for a first-hand look at the organization's

goals and agenda.

Pat Robertson set the tone for the conference early on when he responded to the organization – and himself – being labeled “the religious right” by the media. “Who am I to the right of?” Robertson asked. “Well, I’ll tell you,” he continued. “I am to the right of the *Washington Post* and I am to the right of the ACLU.”

“Ninety-million Americans are functionally illiterate,” he told his audience, and while many attribute the ills of our nation to the breakup of the American family, Robertson pointed out the derision by the media of family values following the Republican National Convention last year. Robertson discussed the radical feminists’ contribution to the backslide of family values, noting their analogies of childbearing to a concentration camp and marriage to slavery. He heralded the pro-life stance, school choice for parents, prayer in schools, reduced taxes for families, and limits to punitive damages.

The “breakout” sessions during the two days helped participants focus on specific issues. Of particular interest to the Catholic League was the session “Catholics and Evangelicals: Building a Winning Coalition,” which was moderated by Marlene Elwell. Speakers included Father Michael Scanlan, of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, and Keith Fournier, of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), an organization established primarily to fight the ACLU.

We were a bit surprised when a head count in the room revealed the audience to be 50/50 Catholic and Evangelical. This particular session was intended to bring together factions formerly at odds in order to strengthen the efforts of the whole body. Despite the lack of balance (both speakers and the moderator were Catholics) and the title (which seemed to beg the question, “are there any other Protestants besides

Evangelicals?" ), I believe some progress was made. And while it was clear during the question and answer period that some old confusion and suspicions remain on both sides, it was nonetheless a positive beginning.

The Christian Coalition is non-partisan. They will not endorse candidates nor solicit funds for campaigns. They will, however, organize people on a grassroots, town-by-town and state-by-state, level in order to alert people to the views and voting records of state and local officials. The goal is to elect as many pro-family, pro-life and pro-liberty officials as possible.

Among the speakers at the conference was Mary Cummins, widow, mother and grandmother, who successfully fought former New York City School Chancellor Fernandez when he tried to introduce his "rainbow curriculum." The fact that this 70-year-old grandmother could literally fight city hall and win – in what the couple next to me referred to as "that den of iniquity" – was a source of encouragement for all. The message was not only that one person can indeed accomplish a great deal, but that no battle, no goal is out of reach. Similar success was visible in the efforts of another speaker, Dr. Richard Neill, a Fort Worth dentist, who single-handedly persuaded more than 195 advertisers to pull their sponsorship of the Phil Donahue show.

The success of the Christian Coalition is inspiring. Since its inception in 1989, it has achieved many of its goals, including the distribution of nonpartisan voter guides and a nonpartisan voter registration campaign. Congressional lobbying and the election of pro-family candidates at every level across the country have also occupied much of its time. It is considered to be one of the most effective grassroots organizations in America, having grown from four people in 1989 to almost one-half million members today.

As Catholics and as Christians, we can take heart. Battles

have been fought and won. And while many battles lie ahead, we can continue to win and grow stronger as a nation of faith by working together and focusing on what we have in common and not on what divides us.

Rabbi Daniel Lapin, the senior rabbi of the Pacific Jewish Center in Venice, California, eloquently addressed the question “Why Jewish Conservatives are Working with Christians.” As he began his speech, he looked out and said, “Who is asking this question?” Lapin responded, “My great-great grandfather.” And how did he answer his great-great grandfather? “We are all a people of faith,” he told him. And it was quite clear that his audience understood why indeed we should all be working together.

Robertson took the occasion of the conference to issue a clear warning. “We will oppose any government policy or official which sets out to destroy this nation.” Paraphrasing George Bush, he concluded, “Read Our Lips: If you advocate the agenda of the radical left, you will not be re-elected.”

For Catholics – most of whom are strangers to political activism – such words are both threatening and challenging. We must come to embrace the idea that we really can effect change in the communities in which we live and work if we only have the will. Working together with others who share many of our deeply held beliefs and values is a big step in that direction.

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## **From the President’s Desk...**

Have you ever noticed how much blasphemy tends to track obscenity? Consider the following observations.

As the bus from La Guardia airport came to a stop in front of Grand Central Station, I noticed a vendor selling newspapers and magazines. Prominently displayed on the side of a vending booth there must have been at least a dozen magazine covers on display, and every one of them featured pictures of naked men or women.

When I went to claim my luggage, I noticed a huge ad alongside the bus. It showed a picture of the pop star Madonna on one side and a picture of Our Lady with baby Jesus on the other. In between was a statement that read "The Difference Between You and Your Parents." The ad was sponsored by VH-1, a second MTV music video channel.

It would be easy to shrug this off as just another commentary on how depraved New York has become. Unfortunately, there's a lot more to it than that. Those who are responsible for this condition have a very wide reach. For example, the new fall TV season is replete with offensive sitcom fare, making it virtually impossible to ignore. The premier of "Daddy Dearest" on Fox Network featured a segment where one of the main characters exclaimed "There goes my sex life. I might as well become a priest or something..." To which Don Rickles said, "That's not a bad idea, from what I hear they are getting a lot of action lately. "

On KFI radio in Los Angeles, promotional spots for Tammy Bruce's program asked parents if they would prefer to entrust their children to the care of Catholic priests or Michael Jackson. A similar statement, one that implied how sexually active priests are these days, was recently aired on the "John Larroquette Show." It seems that generalizing from the few to the many – normally a taboo among the deep thinkers – is no longer in bad taste, not, at least, when it comes to Catholic priests.

The common thread linking these arguably disparate events together is a pervasive contempt for elementary standards of

decency and a profound disrespect for Catholicism. To be sure, obscenity and bigotry are not new. But what is new is the extent to which the nation's elites take pride in their relentless assault on the moral order.

The Madonna poster is not simply the product of an exploitative TV station. It is the product of government. It was the City of New York that allowed this ad to be posted on buses and public phone booths throughout the city. Would the government have allowed an ad juxtaposing a dying AIDS patient with a gay athlete, allowing for the inscription "The Difference Between Today's Gays and the Gays of a Generation Ago"? No, at that point the relativism of today's progressives would quickly come to a halt. That would offend their values. The Madonna poster obviously does not.

Similarly, the TV and radio shows that promote the idea that all priests lead an irresponsible sex life would never be tolerated if the subject were gays. Don't expect the reckless producers of these shows ever to portray homosexuals as a sexually deviant group. That would offend their values. But unfairly portraying priests does not.

It's actually worse than this. The same elites in the media who generalize from a few deviant priests to all clergy feel compelled to distort the truth about homosexuals. For example, in the HBO movie, "And the Band Played On," a decision was made to excise from the script almost all references to the behavioral peculiarities that gave rise to the AIDS epidemic in the first place. This was a calculated act of intellectual dishonesty. Why? Because in the book "And the Band Played On," author Randy Shilts details quite vividly how AIDS came to pass. But to tell the truth would offend gays, hence the decision to censor.

What's at work is more than a double standard: there is a concerted effort to redefine the meaning of vice and virtue. The increasing prevalence of blasphemy and obscenity are



designed to facilitate this objective and that is why they tend to track each other. There's no conspiracy at work here (conspiracies have an element of latency that this effort lacks) but there is a well-defined attempt to trash the existing moral order.

Historically, those societies that have undergone a cultural inversion have not fared well, not even for the architects of destruction. Indeed the record shows that the more extreme the revolution, the greater the chance that the revolution will devour the revolutionaries. That's something our cultural elite would do well to ponder the next time they seek to engineer their nihilism.

– William A. Donohue

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## Can We Be Good without God?

by Dennis Prager

*The following article is the edited text of the opening statement in a debate at Oxford University on March 3, 1993. Under the auspices of Oxford's Chabad Rabbi Shmuel Boteach, Dennis Prager debated Jonathan Glover, a lecturer in moral philosophy at Oxford. The full text of the entire debate appeared in Ultimate Issues (Vol. 9, No. 1, copyright 1993) a scholarly quarterly journal published by Prager. It is reprinted here with permission. For further information write Ultimate Issues, 10573 Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90064.*

If the question is, "Can we be good without God?" the answer is, of course, yes.

Of course there could be people who could be good without God.

There could be people who could be good who believe that extraterrestrials visit them nightly. You can be good if you think that the earth stands on the back of a turtle. There were good pagans. There were good people who worshipped animals. In theory, you can be good and believe in anything. So if the question is to be answered literally, the debate is over.

“Can a human being be good without reference to God?” is therefore obviously not the question. There are two bigger questions.

One is, are people *likely* to be good without God? That’s the question, I think, intelligent people have to ask. The question, “Is it possible for one person to be good without God?,” is no question – just as, incidentally, it is very possible to be evil with God. I am religious, and I am defending the argument on behalf of God’s necessity for ethics. But I am the first to acknowledge that there are quite a number of religious people who are disgusting. Indeed, any religious person who doesn’t acknowledge this is a fool, and does God and religion a disservice. It is a source of deep embarrassment, deep unhappiness for me, but it is a fact of life. Different times have shown different groups doing this. Right now, unfortunately, the most internationally known example is the Iranian *religious fatwah* to murder a human being for what he wrote – to murder in the name of God. It’s as simple as that. I acknowledge it. That people can misuse God and religion is hardly new, but it hardly argues against the necessity of God.

My analogy would be to medicine. Those of you who know of Auschwitz certainly must know of Dr. Mengele, the Nazi doctor who performed grotesque, torturous experiments on human beings; he would inject children’s eyeballs with dye to see if he could make them into “Aryan” blue eyeballs, would X-ray women’s ovaries to see if he could sterilize them, and he did the same to male genitalia. I won’t go through the litany, but

the fact of the German Medical Association accepting his experiments and that he was a medical doctor only reveals that medical doctors can do absolute evil. It doesn't reveal that medicine is unnecessary.

To argue that religion and God are unnecessary to morality because there are evil people in religion is to me tantamount to saying that because Dr. Mengele and the German Medical Association did what they did, we don't need medicine.

God is necessary for morality to survive, and I will explain why. But I want it clear at the outset that I will not defend an absurdity, and it would be absurd to argue that there are no good people who are atheists, since my worthy debater is a good man who is an atheist.

Now, having said that, there are two separate questions here.

The first, which I have just discussed, is a very real, practical question: Are we more likely to make good people with or without God? The second is: Do good and evil exist if there is no God?

Let me deal first with this question – can good and evil exist if there is no God?

Here the answer to me is as evident as my first points were, that there are bad people who believe in God and good people who don't. It is clear that if there is no God, there is no good and evil; there are only *opinions* about good and evil. Good and evil without God are purely subjective: I think that torturing children is bad; Mengele thought that torturing children is good.

If there is no God who makes a declaration about the torture of children, then it's Prager's opinion against Mengele's opinion. If there isn't a moral source that transcends Mengele and Prager, there is no way to say that Mengele is wrong – capital W. You can only say, "I, personally, think that what

he did is wrong.” But so what? You may say, “I personally, think that a BMW is a better car than a Mercedes,” but nobody argues that this is an objective statement. That’s taste. Without God, good and evil are taste. Like I think this painting is beautiful and this one is ugly. I think this act is beautiful and this act is ugly.

Just as an honest religious person must confront the reality of religious people who do evil, an honest atheist must confront the fact that with all his or her desire for there to be good in this world, for us to be able to declare Auschwitz evil or the Gulag evil or racism evil, they are purely terms of taste if there is no God. That is all that we have.

If there is no God, you and I are purely the culmination of chance, pure random chance. And whether I kick your face in, or I support you charitably, the universe is as indifferent to that as to whether a star in another galaxy blows up tonight. You are, after all, as I am, just stellar matter, if there is no God. We happen to be self-conscious stellar matter, but so what? Whether you’re kicked or a stone is kicked is only an atomic difference – it’s a molecular question, not a moral question, if there’s no moral universe.

What atheists who speak in terms of good and evil have done is appropriated religious dialogue for themselves. They have kidnapped our way of speaking and said what was rooted in God doesn’t need God any longer.

Which now brings me to the second and perhaps in some way more fundamental question because good and evil are ultimately a question of how we behave, not a question of theory: Are we likely to produce people who are good with or without God? Which is the greater likelihood?

Let me begin by asking a question that I have posed on my radio show in Los Angeles numerous times to atheist callers who tell me that religion is irrelevant to goodness. I ask

them the following question. Imagine you are walking in a bad Los Angeles neighborhood at midnight. You are alone, and you notice ten men walking toward you in a dark alley. Would you or would you not be relieved to know that they had just attended a Bible class?

Your laughter is identical to their laughter though usually they don't laugh because they feel that they are trapped. Why did most of you laugh?

Because you, too, even if you are a member of Atheists United, if you are a member of Down With God, Inc., you, too, would breathe a major sigh of relief if you were walking in a dark alley and you knew they had just been studying Genesis. Because while it is possible they will mug or rape you, deep in your gut you know that the likelihood is that they won't. If you could only know one thing, that would be a good thing to know about the ten men who are walking toward you.

I will go further. I interviewed Pearl and Sam Oliner, two professors of sociology at California State University at Humboldt, the authors of the most highly regarded work on altruism, *The Altruistic Personality*. The book is a lifetime of study of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. If there was any time where moral clarity prevailed, that was certainly such a time.

The Oliners are not religious people. That is very important. They had a sociological agenda, not a religious agenda. They arrived at many conclusions, but I asked them the following question: "Professor Oliner"- it was to him in this case – "knowing all you now know about who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, if you had to return as a Jew to Poland where the greatest amount of massacring took place, and you could knock on the door of only one person in the hope that they would rescue you, would you knock on the door of a Polish lawyer, a Polish doctor, a Polish artist,"- I tried to pick the best possible professions – "a Polish farmer, or a Polish priest?"

Without hesitation, he said, “a Polish priest.” And his wife added, “I would prefer a Polish nun” because, she said, they had a better record than the priests did.

I thought that this was a pretty devastating response. Over a doctor, over a lawyer, over an artist they would have picked a Polish priest – and these are Jews speaking who know that the Catholic Church’s record in World War II was not a great one. It was a mixed bag, but this is not the time for that issue. But when push came to shove, that’s where they would knock.

My friends, when push comes to shove, that’s where we would knock, just as you would be relieved to know that ten people had just walked out of a Bible class. That’s reality. At Oxford or Harvard or wherever, in the highest realms of ethereal theory, you can work out brilliant philosophical schemes for morality, but in real life, in actual real life, that’s the door you knock on – where somebody actually believes there’s a God who said, “Thou shalt not murder.”

Sure, there are a lot of people who claim to be religious or even are religious and don’t live by it. I have no excuse for them. I’m merely talking about the likelihood on planet earth that it is the door that you, too, would knock on, even if you were a member of Atheists United.

To see what secularism induces, it is very important to look at campuses. In the Western world, the secular temple is the university. There are some religious people at universities, but by and large it is a place that is based upon secularism.

In the secular university in the United States there is a massive movement toward what is called multiculturalism. In theory, it means the celebration of many cultures, which obviously, I am for, since I’m a member of a minority culture. I obviously want people to celebrate their cultures . But that’s not what multiculturalism is about. Multiculturalism is, at its essence, an onslaught against the belief that any

culture's values are better than any other culture's values.

It is ultimately an argument against the Judea-Christian tradition, which held that its values were superior. To those who hold this Judea-Christian view, however, as either (a) purely arrogant, or (b) pointless, I have a question that the late Professor Allen Bloom used to ask his students at the University of Chicago.

Bloom writes that he would enter the sophomore class where he taught, and he knew at the outset exactly what they believed – that culture determines morality. Remember, if there is no God, morality is a matter of what a culture says it is. So he would ask them the following question: Imagine that you were in the British Imperial Government in India in the 19th Century. You had complete control as Governor over the area of your jurisdiction and you were informed that the Hindus in your area were about to engage in Satee. Satee is the Hindu practice of burning a widow with her husband's corpse. Would you or would you not stop it?

Why does he ask the question? It should be obvious. If you say that you would not stop it, then you are implicitly admitting that culture entirely determines morality. Though *you* think widow burning is wrong, many Hindus thought it was right, and who are you to say it's wrong and stop it? But if you *would* stop it, then you don't hold that all cultural values are morally equal; you really do believe in a universal morality, and that morality is not merely a matter of culture, and you would therefore impose your morality on those Hindus.

So, what did the students answer, having been given this great cognitive dissonance? "The British didn't belong in India," which is somewhat of a non-sequitur.

I would stop Satee because I believe in a God who says, "Thou shalt not murder," and it doesn't have an asterisk denoting "except for widows." Therefore, I would, with great respect to

Hindu tradition, say, "You are wrong. So long as I have power here, you will not burn widows."

I'll give you a second example, which took place in France two weeks ago. An African woman was sentenced to prison for performing clitoridectomies on her daughters – the removal of a girl's clitoris. This has been performed on between 70 and 100 million women in Africa, in Muslim states primarily.

Given my value system, that is the mutilation of a human being. It is an evil. To the French, heirs of the Judea-Christian and Western traditions, this is an evil. To this woman, it was a good. I would have loved to have asked the French, on what grounds they could arrest this woman, if they don't have a religious basis. They could say, "This is French law. you can't do it in France." But this argument is certainly against multiculturalism. It certainly argues that our idea is better; we say it's mutilation, we should stop it.

The Nuremberg Trials were predicated on the belief that there is a universal law. But where does universal law come from? The universe? Neptune? Does Neptune form the Ten Commandments? Does human reason? Give me a break. Human reason can argue for anything. People use reason any way they want. It's very reasonable in that culture to have clitoridectomies, just as it was reasonable to support Stalin – which brings me to one of the reasons I became religious.

I looked at what secularism produced. May I tell every one of you who wants to point out the atrocities done in the name of God, you don't have a leg to stand on compared to the atrocities committed by secular ideologies. Nazism and Communism make religious evil-doers look like Boy Scouts.

Communism and Nazism are secular ideologies. They were onslaughts against the Judea-Christian tradition and they did a very effective job obliterating that tradition. Their Fuhrer was God. You swore fidelity to Hitler. There was no God above



Hitler who could say Hitler was wrong. Hitler was the source of morality. In the Soviet Union, Stalin and the Party were the source of morality.

What made me religious? Seeing how many secular intellectuals backed Stalin. The only place in the Western world – and this is my field, Communist affairs – where you could find organized support for Communism was among secular intellectuals. Organized labor was anti-Communist, but from Cambridge to Harvard to Stanford, you would find professor after professor who had studied dialectal materialism and therefore could somehow find reason to support Stalin and the Gulag.

The people who supported it were in the secular temple, the university. It was the moral chaos of the university that made me realize that what the Psalms said – “Wisdom begins with the fear of God” was true.

Ultimately, yes, one individual here, another individual there could be really sweet and fine without God, but a system that obliterates the religious basis of morality will ultimately consume itself. I look at the Netherlands today and I see the latest law they passed on behalf of euthanasia, even liberalizing it further so that we have now quantum leaps in the amount of killing doctors can do in the Netherlands, where the doctor has been gradually transformed from the person who saves you to the person who can easily kill you. This is all done by secular humanists for very compassionate and rational reasons.

Obviously, reason alone does not bring you to morality. It was reasonable to do what the Greeks did – leaving deformed and ugly children on mountaintops to die. Greek writers said the Jews were barbarians for keeping all their children alive. The Greeks only kept esthetically pleasing ones alive. Who was right? The ones who followed Greek reason? It is, after all, much more rational to keep only healthy, good looking babies

alive.

But every one of you thinks it's wrong because you're the heir to the Jewish and then Christian tradition that said human beings are created in God's image. You get rid of that tradition and then you start treating people as they were treated in a place like Auschwitz, where you make a person into a lamp shade. Why not? If there is no God, all you've done is rearrange molecules.

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## Catholics in Media kicks off

Cardinal Roger Mahoney will celebrate Mass at the Beverly Hilton Hotel on the morning of September 26, as part of the festivities marking the inaugural event of Catholics in the Media (CIM), an association of Catholics in the entertainment business.

The group, founded by Jack Shea, a director/producer and his wife, Patt who is a writer, was formed in response to requests from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, on whose communications committee the Sheas serve.

According to *The Tidings*, the group was established to serve as a forum in which members would be able to share thoughts of how their faith informs the work they do. "In this group," said Jack Shea, "people can pray, share their faith and talk about ways that they can serve the church." Capuchin Father Anthony Scannell, former president of Franciscan Communications is the CIM chaplain. The group's honorary committee includes Alan Alda, MacDonald Carey, Tony Danza, Kevin Dobson, Bob Hope, Ann Jillian, Carroll O'Connor, Gregory Peck and Loretta Young Lewis.

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# Catholic-Haters

Focus on Faith, a question and answer column in *The Tidings* (Los Angeles Archdiocese) recently (8/29/93) featured an item on "Catholic Haters." The column is written by Fr. Gregory Coiro, OFM Cap. who works in the Public Affairs Office of the Archdiocese and who just happens to be chaplain of our California chapter.

The question concerned a Tony Alamo flyer which the writer had found on his windshield. He concluded by asking, "Who is this guy and why does he hate the Catholic Church so much?"

Father Coiro proceeded to tell him something of "Pastor" Alamo's strange background and especially his bizarre claims about and peculiar obsession with the Catholic Church. Alamo claims that the Vatican controls the major news media as well as the FBI, CIA and IRS and that the Jesuits assassinated Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy.

Father Coiro described how he called an Alamo toll-free number and managed to get one of Alamo's followers to hang up after an exchange in which he asked if the person paid income taxes ("Of course I do.") to the Church controlled IRS!

Father Coirto concluded his column by calling on his readers to join the Catholic League:

"Every Catholic who cares about the persistance of anti-Catholicism as the most pervasive and socially acceptable prejudice in American society should belong to the Catholic League ... I am not only the League's local chaplain. I'm also a member."

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# Elders wins Surgeon General bid; Catholic League scores points, wins friends

President Clinton couldn't afford to see another nominee shot down in flames, so careful maneuvering, parliamentary procedure and a great deal of political capital were utilized in order to win Senate confirmation for controversial Surgeon General nominee Dr. Joycelyn Elders.

Letters of "apology" from both Dr. Elders and President Clinton addressed to NCCB chair Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore were released just days before the Senate vote in an attempt to appease Catholics but critics, including the Catholic League, were quick to point out the inadequacy of the so-called apology and its politically motivated timing.

In a press conference called by the Catholic League on September 7, the day of the Senate vote, Dr. Patrick Riley noted, "All she said was 'Well, if you're offended, I'm sorry.' She doesn't withdraw what she said. It's hardly an adequate apology."

James A. Smith, government relations director for the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission called the apology to I Keeler "half hearted" and went on to point out that there had been no apology offered to evangelicals and other Christians who had also been vilified by the acid-tongued Elders.

The Catholic League statement opposing Elders' confirmation was co-signed by Smith, representing the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as by representatives of Catholic War

Veterans, the American Family Association and Eagle Forum.

Brian T. Olszewski, editor of the lively *Northwest Indiana Catholic* offered a tongue-in-cheek editorial comment: "Do you think the president called her and said, 'Look, Joycelyn, I know you don't like Catholics but I'm going to need them again in '96, so could you at least apologize.' He does, she did, and now the Senate will confirm her appointment."

Knights of Columbus spokesman Russell Shaw, a member of the Catholic League national board, told Catholic News Service that her response was not "altogether satisfactory."

Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, chair of the bishops' pro-life committee acknowledged her apology but went on to question her public stands and aggressive pursuit of issues with which the church cannot possibly agree.

Boston's *Pilot* editorialized, "She never apologized for what she said. She merely regretted that you and I took offense." In his weekly column in the *Pilot*, Cardinal Bernard Law lashed out at the anti-Catholic and anti-religious bias in American culture today (story below).

Carroll Quinn, president of the National Council of Catholic Women summed up the feelings of many when she said that Elders' apology "does not end our concern over the willingness of a government nominee to make anti-Catholic statements in the first place."

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## **Boston cardinal blasts media**

# bias

"It is not a case of Catholic paranoia to think that it is open season on the Catholic Church in the public square." Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law didn't mince words in going after the news media in his weekly *Pilot* column (9/3/93).

The Cardinal went on to blast the media for "the negative way in which the Church is so often portrayed in the press," singling out the media's handling of stories about clergy and child abuse which "weigh heaviest on every bishop's heart." He acknowledged that even "One such case is one too many."

He went on to excoriate the media for increasing the pain of all involved in these human tragedies by their irresponsible handling of these stories.

He also chided the media for their next great fixation, "the exaltation of Catholic dissent."

"The press," he said, "seems obsessed with a desire to redefine Catholicism along lines which are congruous with the prevailing culture: absolutes are out and toleration is the ultimate and only virtue. This kind of tolerance is the antithesis of what faith is all about."

Cardinal Law cut to the heart of the problem noting, "These are difficult days because the culture of death in which we live is diametrically opposed to faith." And he added, "The Catholic Church takes a beating in the press because we are the largest religious body in the country. The underlying hostility of our culture is not only anti-Catholic, however, it is anti all organized religion ."

Massachusetts chapter president Dan Flatley praised the cardinal's statement. "Within the American hierarchy, Cardinal Law has been one of the most consistent, forthright and outspoken critics of media bias against the Church. He has

also been a strong supporter of the Catholic League. We applaud his courage. His remarks deserve the attention of all concerned Catholics.”

A Catholic New Service story quoting extensively from the Cardinal’s column appeared in dozens of Catholic weeklies across the country.

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## The Culture of Disbelief

*Newsweek’s* religion editor recently reviewed *The Culture of Disbelief*, an insightful new book written by Yale law professor Stephen Carter, who takes a critical look at the way America’s culture treats religion and religious people.

The former law clerk for the late Justice Thurgood Marshall, Carter argues persuasively for a return to the days when ideas driven by religious convictions were welcomed as valuable contributions to public debate.

Describing religion as “a way of denying the authority of the rest of the world,” Carter sees an essential role for religion as “an independent moral voice” which should mediate through institutions “between the citizen and the government.”

Carter points to the legalization of abortion as the event which triggered the flight of liberals from religion. Liberal elites “belittle religious devotion” and “discourage religion as serious activity.”

Carter contends that the “wall of separation” so often cited in church/state conflicts was originally invoked more to protect religion from government than government from religion. In Carter’s view, religion is greatly threatened and

he espouses a much greater accommodation of religious practices. For example, he would allow the ritual use of peyote by Native Americans and the inclusion of parochial schools in voucher plans.

Although we do not agree with all of Professor Carter's convictions, his book deserves a thoughtful audience.

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## **Religious freedom survives first Russian test**

After President Yeltsin refused to sign a bill that would have restricted foreign missionaries and foreign-based religious organizations in Russia, the Russian legislature recently approved a new version of the bill.

The original bill, which was supported by the Russian Orthodox Church and passed by the Russian legislature in July, was an attempt to control the anticipated flood of churches and sects into Russia following the collapse of Communism. Because its provisions required foreign-based churches to affiliate with a Russian church or else seek state accreditation, the July bill was criticized by religious leaders world-wide as an infringement of religious liberty in Russia.

In a letter to the Russian delegation at the United Nations, Catholic League president Bill Donohue expressed League concerns about the proposed limitations on religious liberty in Russia represented by the July bill.

Although the revised legislation removes some controversial elements of the July bill, questions remain about the extent of governmental limits on foreign religious activity in Russia



under the new law, which has been sent back for Yeltsin' s signature.