

“MALL CONFESSIONS”

In October, MTV, the popular youth rock cable TV channel, is offering its version of reality TV. “Mall Confessions” features teens who will reveal lurid sins in a “confessional.”

When we first heard about this we didn’t like the sound of it, so Pat Scully gave MTV a ring. They were quite responsive and assured him that MTV was not trying to parody Catholicism. Teens will be “confessing” in an RV driven to malls across the country and no one will be with them; there will no “absolution,” etc. We’ll monitor this one nonetheless.

CAMPAIGNING IN CHURCH

What do Protestants, Jews, Republicans and Democrats have in common that is not true of Catholics? Protestants and Jews allow Republicans and Democrats to campaign in their churches and synagogues. But Catholics do not. Here are just a few examples.

Both contenders for the New York Senate seat, Republican Rick Lazio and Democrat Hillary Clinton, recently spent time campaigning in synagogues in the Hamptons. And just about everyone takes his campaign to the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in Harlem.

We decided to let the press know of our concerns:

“Rick Lazio and Hillary Clinton got a free pass from the press last weekend when they took their campaigns to some houses of worship. They got their free passes precisely because he campaigned in synagogues and she campaigned in a Protestant

church. Had they whipped up the faithful by making highly partisan appeals in a Catholic church, the media would have gone ballistic.

“Imagine the following headline: ‘Archbishop Edward M. Egan Invites New York Senatorial Candidates to Speak at 10:15 Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Sunday.’ Now is there anyone in the press corps who wouldn’t be screaming about the constitutional principle of separation of church and state? In fact, the double standard is worse than this: let Archbishop Egan—or any other priest—address a public policy issue from the pulpit and the next day the pundits go crazy.

“It’s not hard to figure out what is going on: the name for it is bigotry. To be exact, the media do not want to offend African Americans (it is in their Protestant churches that these abuses typically occur), nor do they want to offend Jews. But Catholics? They’re fair game. Now if anyone has a plausible alternative explanation, I’d love to know what it is.”

No sooner had we released this statement to the media than it was reported that Al Gore took his campaign to a Protestant church in Sag Harbor, Long Island. This one was an Episcopalian church dominated by white people. As usual, not one pundit complained.

ART BANNED IN VIRGINIA

The city of Norfolk, Virginia wanted to put a piece of art at a downtown intersection but didn’t have the money to do so. Instead, they decided to borrow a piece from the Chrysler Museum of Art until a permanent display could be funded. But when a Jewish group protested, the art was removed. The

artwork was a statue of St. Francis of Assisi.

The art was on display for a month before anyone complained. Then officials at the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater got involved. “A public place should feature art that is inclusive—not art that commemorates a single religion,” said Rabbi Israel Zoberman. Town officials buckled and scrapped the art.

City Council member W. Randy Wright chimed in saying, “We need to be sensitive to all of the elements of our community.” We wrote to him asking how the removal of the art could be considered sensitive to Catholics.

WE WON

In the June *Catalyst*, we asked our members to write to the senior warden at the Texas Department of Corrections. Our complaint was that inmates at the TDCJ Stevenson Unit were denied requests for meatless meals on Fridays during Lent while dietary rules were observed for those who practice other religions.

We won. “Effective October 1, 2000,” the new directive says “all offenders will have the ability to choose a regular, meat-free or pork-free meal every day.”

Thanks to all those who wrote to complain. But just one thing: what’s this business about “meat-free *or* pork-free”? Since when isn’t pork meat? Or is it that the bureaucrats are so used to accommodating some religions that they don’t recognize what’s going on?

WE WON WITHOUT A FIGHT

A producer of a tony religious website, beliefnet.com, asked us to review two proposed ads to see if they passed muster with us. The one with the pope was fine as it was a light-hearted quip that conjoined the pope with the Dalai Lama and a rabbi. It reads, "The Pope, the Dalai Lama and Rabbi Schmuley Boteach walk into a bar..." At the bottom, it advertises beliefnet.com with the comment, "We all believe in something." While not our cup of tea, it did not single out the pope and was not insulting.

However, the one with the Virgin Mary was not: inserted over a picture of Mary with her arms extended were the words, "Religious icon? Garden gnome? Discuss." Though it was far from the worst we've seen, we recommended they drop it. They did just that. End of story.