

# TESTIMONY OF THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE PROPOSED Int. 645-A

*League president William Donohue wrote the following testimony. League communications director, Patrick Scully, read it on August 21 before the New York City Council.*

"The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. We defend individual Catholics against discrimination and the Church against defamation.

"We oppose Bill NO. 645-A for three reasons: (a) it would unduly abridge the free speech rights of all anti-abortion protesters (b) it would unduly abridge the religious liberty rights of some anti-abortion protesters and (c) evidence of its necessity is lacking.

"Those who oppose abortion do so because they believe that innocent human life is lost when children are aborted. To selectively target these protesters is wrong constitutionally and wrong morally. It is wrong constitutionally because it violates the standard of viewpoint neutrality that undergirds First Amendment protections. It is wrong morally because it effectively treats anti-abortion protesters as second-class citizens.

"Bill NO. 645-A also undermines religious liberty. Catholics who protest abortion, for example, do so out of religious commitment. To lock up nuns and priests who stand near the entrance of abortion clinics holding signs saying, 'Choose Life,' is constitutionally and morally outrageous.

"Finally, there is no compelling evidence that the rights of anti-abortion protesters need to be further curtailed. This law is not being proposed because events demand it; rather it is being proposed because politics demand it. The laws on the

books provide sufficient safeguards to those who seek to enter an abortion clinic. Quite simply, there is no empirical evidence that supports the need for this bill.

“The Catholic League therefore urges that this bill be rejected.”

No vote has yet been taken on this bill. The reasons are wholly political. Our side, the pro-life side, dominated the hearing. But this is an election year and none of the mayoral candidates (which include Council Speaker Peter Vallone) want to draw too much attention to this bill even though all of them publicly support it. We will keep our members posted.

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## **SACRED AND PROFANE MEET ON SCREEN**

Part of our mission at the Catholic League is to review films that come to our attention as possibly exhibiting anti-Catholicism. Given Hollywood's infatuation with films that mock the Catholic Church, we usually do not have to wait long for one to come along. But it is not just American movies; every now and then a foreign movie is released in the U.S. that deserves our attention.

One of these opened in September, made in Colombia, called “La Virgen de los Sicarios,” or “Our Lady of the Assassins.” So we sent our researcher, Louis Giovino, to review it.

While the movie is not particularly offensive (certainly not in the vein that “Dogma” was), it is not a film to show in religion class. The main character is a jaded, self-absorbed, homosexual writer who returns to his home country of Colombia

and takes up with a teenager. The young boy has a habit of shooting anyone who even makes a face at him. Although the writer disapproves, he finds the boy strangely attractive.

The movie is more about the senseless violence and corruption of Colombia than anything else, but it includes a huge dose of Catholic imagery. The writer and boy spend their days visiting churches. The former is a cynical agnostic, albeit he kneels and mumbles prayers. The teenage assassin, although he kills when he gets peeved, goes on pilgrimages to shrines and wears a scapular for protection. Ultimately there is no redemption, just carnage. And the nihilistic outlook implicitly says that faith is either empty or foolish.

However, it is telling how the filmmaker's use of Catholic imagery still permeates the work. Even given the main character's acid diatribes about God, the pope, and humanity in general, the juxtaposition of Catholic statues, candles and stained glass against the backdrop of violence and drug use provides for an interesting meeting of the sacred and the profane. Regardless of what is intended, a film like this shows that the power of Catholic imagery is very strong.

So while we can't recommend "Our Lady of the Assassins," we take some delight in the backhanded complement the film pays to Catholicism.

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## **REQUEST FOR CONSCIENCE CLAUSE IN SENATE BILL**

On September 10, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions held a hearing on S. 104, "Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage Act of

2001.” The bill, introduced by Senator Olympia Snowe, would require private health insurance plans that cover drugs to cover prescription contraceptives. The legislation does not provide for a conscience clause that would allow an exemption for religious organizations.

William Donohue explained the league’s reaction to the bill with a statement to the press and a letter to the senators on this committee. Here is the text of his remarks:

“I am writing to every member of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions asking that a conscience clause be inserted into the ‘Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage Act of 2001.’ This country has a long and honorable tradition of allowing religious organizations to exempt themselves from bills that violate doctrinal teachings. It should be so honored again. The net result of not granting an exemption would be to deny prescription drug coverage to employees of Catholic organizations.

“There are two other related objections. First, if no conscience clause is granted it would surely constitute an egregious violation of the principle of separation of church and state. Second, the absence of a conscience clause in this bill would set the stage for what the bill’s backers really want—a mandate that private health care carriers pay for abortion. This is not guesswork: in the bill’s ‘Findings’ section, one of the entries listed complains that women spend much more than men on out-of-pocket health care costs, ‘with contraceptives and reproductive health care services accounting for much of the difference.’ The term, ‘reproductive health care,’ of course, is code for abortion.

“We will protest this bill at every stage in the legislative process until a conscience clause is included.”

This bill represents a determined effort on the part of feminists and those who want to weaken the power of the

Catholic Church. What they want is to tame the Church by bringing its teachings into harmony with their pro-abortion and secular agenda.

As this issue progresses, we will keep our members abreast and may ask that they participate in a writing campaign.

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## THE POPE DOESN'T WEAR A FUNNY HAT

Dean Evans & Associates, located in Englewood, Colorado, recently promoted some of its Event Management Systems software (the software creates calendars) by mailing an advertisement to churches geared toward church management. They tried to be cute but failed.

On the cover of the ad is a man with a silly face dressed in vestments and a mitre. The mitre has a note on it that reads: "Is managing your calendar by hand a nuisance?" The caption next to it reads: "Does the pope wear a funny hat?"

We were no sooner in possession of the calendar when we received a call from the vice president of Dean Evans & Associates. He was extremely contrite and apologetic about the ad. We told him we had already received several complaints. He said that the company had made a terrible mistake in judgment and he wished to have our input as to how his company could rectify it.

The next day we were faxed a letter from Dean Evans, CEO of the company. In it he accepted full responsibility and apologized for the ad saying: "There is no doubt whatsoever that the representation of the Pope was disrespectful and that

the 'humor' was in the poorest of taste. The piece should never have been produced and mailed."

Evans then pledged to send a letter of apology to every parish that received the mailing. Not only that, he wrote that anything similar to this ad will be unacceptable, "not just because it was offensive to some of our customers and prospects, but also because it inaccurately reflects what I know is a fine and wholesome organization." He then called the office as a follow up.

We thank Dean Evans and his company for the swift handling of this matter.

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## **STORY WITHIN A STORY**

There can be no tolerance for racism. But when it comes to tolerating anti-Catholicism, that's a different story. We come to this conclusion after monitoring the reaction to a state legislator who forwarded an e-mail he received that contained racist and anti-Catholic statements.

In August, a lawmaker from Harnett County, North Carolina, forwarded a bigoted e-mail he had received to his fellow lawmakers. Rep. Don Davis received an e-mail from a white supremacist group that charged it was white men and Christianity that made America great; Catholicism was blamed for enslaving Europe and perverting the Bible.

When his colleagues got the message, they went bonkers. Over the racial remark, that is. No one was apparently offended by the slam against Catholicism.

The Legislative Black Caucus in North Carolina blasted Davis

for seemingly endorsing the racial comment. Davis initially stood his ground saying, "I think there's a lot of truth in that. The white men came from England and made this country great." After being pressured, Davis issued an apology about the racial remark. There was no apology for the Catholic-bashing statement.

This story within a story didn't end there. Not only did the local NAACP not object to the anti-Catholic comment, local Protestant clergymen followed suit. Both were disturbed by the "white men" quip.

This incident demonstrates what we've been saying at the Catholic League for a long time: some forms of bigotry are more equal than others.

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## CHURCH BLAMED FOR AIDS

AIDS is caused by the Catholic Church. Many sexperts and homosexual activists have made this accusation before, and even members of the Protestant clergy have been known to agree, but now we have the major newspapers in Seattle joining the bandwagon.

In August, both the *Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ran articles blaming the Church for AIDS. In addition to irresponsible accusations, the newspapers lied about the facts. To be specific, the *Seattle Times* said, "There is virtually no debate among experts in medical science and public health that condom use is critical to preventing the spread of the disease." What is striking about this sweeping generalization is that just recently a major report was issued concluding that condom use is *not* a safe way to guard against HIV/AIDS.

“In logic that is both convoluted and deadly,” writes Mindy Cameron in the *Seattle Times*, “bishops reasoned that condom use contributes to the ‘breaking down of self-control and mutual respect.’” There is nothing convoluted about this: it is a straightforward statement—self-control breaks down when people succumb to their passions and engage in immoral acts.

Kimberly Mills of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* is just as irresponsible. After first repeating the canard about the Vatican being “officially silent during the Holocaust,” she blames the Church for AIDS in Africa. “Now a viral version of Hitler is rampaging through another part of the world,” she says, “and the Vatican risks similar ignominy if it cannot find a way to relax the ban on condoms, particularly in Africa where more than 25 million people have been infected with HIV...”

Now had all those 25 million followed the Vatican’s teachings on sexuality, they wouldn’t have HIV. But that would have required self-control and mutual respect.

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## VIRGIN MARY AD

WANTED:

The Virgin Mary –

Dead AND Alive!

[www.truth4today.net](http://www.truth4today.net)

That’s what the ad said in the August 16 edition of the *Oregonian*. We tapped into the website and found an Internet version of the same Catholic-baiting ploy we’ve seen many times before in print. There is a picture of the Virgin



Mary standing in front of a mother and child—all done quite respectfully—with a statement that appears below the ad. Only this time, on the Internet version, there is a question mark at the end instead of an exclamation point.

Here is what the statement says:

There are two groups of people

One group would like to believe that Mary is still in the  
grave

The other group would like to believe that she is risen

Neither group wants to believe the opinion of the other group

Why not give yourself an advantage and get both opinions

Then you can decide for yourself

Similar kinds of nonsense can be found on this website. What is surprising is not that such stuff exists (crackpots have always been with us) but that there is an audience for it. Anti-Catholicism, we've often said, comes in many varieties. This ad proves our point.

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## **NETWORK TV GOES OVER THE EDGE**

Television producers at the major networks have pledged to shock the public by deliberately going over the edge with their new shows this season. For example, obscenities will be uttered on prime time television for the first time, including the "F" word. This is something that the producers at CBS, ABC and NBC are determined to do.

They feel good about it. What's new is not the goal but the

resolve. Steven Bochco, executive producer of the new ABC show, "Philly," has long boasted of his desire to push the envelope but up until now the in-house censors at the networks have held him back. But that's about to change.

TV executives say a record number of scripts are being submitted to them that are replete with vulgarities. There will also be "nudity warnings" on shows scheduled to air during the family hour. Not surprisingly, blasphemies will also be aired.

Aaron Sorkin is the executive producer of the popular NBC show "The West Wing." It is his personal goal to break the longstanding network taboo of not using the Lord's name in vain. Whether he succeeds is up to the top brass at NBC.

We have long noticed that obscenity and blasphemy frequently track each other. Obscene art displays, for instance, are often accompanied by artwork that directly attacks Jesus or Mary. The purpose is to destroy the traditional values structure that undergirds our society. Why? Because of twisted ideas of freedom.

The Catholic League will monitor these shows carefully for any content that ridicules or insults our religion. We will also deliver a swift response if offended.

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## **"DON'T CRY FOR ME GALILEO"**

William McGurn is a good Catholic who writes a lot of unsigned editorials for the *Wall Street Journal*; he also writes a number of signed articles. His work is uniformly outstanding. In the course of a piece he did on President Bush's decision on stem cell research, McGurn lamented the fact that not

enough priests have addressed the Church's teachings on birth control and abortion. Many letters agreeing with him were subsequently published. Next came a letter from someone with a different perspective.

It seems that someone named Kenneth H. Beck from Newtown, Pennsylvania, doesn't like us. He went nuts because one of the letter writers, Father Gregory Lockwood, had the gall to comment that the Church has had "2000 years of experience with the human person." To which Beck replies, "Does he exclude the Inquisition, the Borgias, the persecution of Galileo and other embarrassments from that statement?"

This is the kind of reflexive bigotry that is commonplace these days. Mention that the Church has an honorable record of serving humanity and odds are that some lout will yell, "Oh, yeah, how about Galileo?" Now just imagine if someone were to commend blacks for their service to America and out popped the refrain, "Oh, yeah, how about all the muggings you people have committed?"

Galileo. He was quite a guy. Which inspires us to say that we Catholics need our own song. We need an Eva Peron-style rendition of "Don't Cry for Me Galileo." It'd be great if we could get Phil Donahue to do the video.

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## DON'T LOOK FOR LOGIC

In August, the New Jersey Supreme court ruled that a man could decide the fate of frozen embryos that he and his former wife had created. Here's what happened.

The court was asked to decide whether a man could have the frozen embryos that he and his former wife had created

implanted in another women. The court ruled he could not. To complicate matters, the former wife said she did not want to become a parent again against her will and sought to have the embryos destroyed so they could not be donated or implanted in someone else. A unanimous decision by the New Jersey Supreme court, 7-0, ruled that the man could keep the seven embryos in storage or have them destroyed.

This strikes us as bizarre. A man gets to decide the fate of his frozen embryos against the will of his former wife. But had she been pregnant with a child that he fathered, she could elect to have an abortion even over his protestations.

All of which means that a father has more rights over the life of his child at the embryonic stage than at the fetal stage; conversely, the mother has no rights at the embryonic stage but then acquires absolute rights at the fetal stage. Don't look for logic on this one.