

# FASHION STATEMENTS

There was this picture of an particularly ugly-looking bare-chested young man holding what looked to be a football-shaped something or other with a handle on it. What got the attention of Bernadette Brady were the big rosary beads that were hung around his neck.

Tongue-in-cheek, Brady called Moschino, the Madison Avenue store that ran the ad, and asked how much the rosary beads were. Perplexed, the person said it was not the rosary beads that were for sale, but the football-shaped pocketbook. Rick Hinshaw took it from there, registering a complaint with the smart-alecky store.

Moschino was lucky the Catholic League didn't react the way the Vatican did when it spotted some ads it found offensive. In July, Italian designers released their fall-winter collections in Rome, with more attention paid to their political statements than to their apparel.

One designer announced he would play a CD recording of the pope singing a Gregorian chant while another planned to have his models drink

Holy Water. The Vatican wasn't amused by the former's misappropriation of the pope's work and threatened a lawsuit over copyright infringement.

The way the *New York Times* explains it, "Fashion now is invoking the Lord's name not in vain, but out of New Age vanity." That's probably true, but it hardly makes these fashion statements less offensive. Besides, isn't there some New Age guru or song they can pan?

The richness of the Catholic tradition gives designers much to feed on, but that doesn't justify abusing our heritage to make a quick buck.

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## CATHOLIC NURSES WIN

Over the summer, two Catholic nurses from upstate New York won a major victory in court that gives new legal rights to pro-life hospital employees. The New York State Appellate Division ruled in late July that nurses who are dismissed from a hospital for refusing to assist in an abortion have a legal right to sue the hospital. Previously, the law in New York held that nurses could excuse themselves from participating in abortion procedures but could not file a civil suit if they were penalized for doing so.

In November 1996, Deborah Larson and Christine Thornton were asked by the head nurse whether they would assist in an abortion. When they said they would not, they were cited with insubordination; subsequently they were fired.

The appeals court ruled that they were fired for adhering to their religious beliefs and could therefore bring suit against the hospital. Hopefully, the nurses will now go forward and win in the courts.

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## DIESEL APOLOGIZES

In the March *Catalyst*, we ran a short story on an ad by Diesel that appeared in the March edition of *Marie Claire*. The ad pictured several women wearing Diesel jeans draped in a habit headpiece praying the rosary; in a grotto behind them was a statue of the Virgin Mary, who was also wearing jeans.

We are glad to say that an apology was finally granted by the company. The complaints that the company received were then passed on to the parent company which created the ad. It is located in Molvena, Italy. We hope not to see a repeat performance.

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## **BORDERS BALKS**

One of our members from Bohemia, Long Island went book browsing at Borders on a Sunday evening and walked away angry. His anger was fed by what he encountered in the "Religion" section of the store. There he found a quartet singing anti-Catholic songs. The quartet, billed as a "lesbigay" group, started singing lines like "Jesus loves me yes I know," followed by attacks on Jesus and Christians.

Bob Micca, who brought this to our attention, said that one of the lesbians began blasting the Catholic Church, especially priests, for its teachings on sexuality (e.g., condoms make priests afraid, etc.) The group was part of the Dream OUT Loud series, a set of programs featuring homosexuals during Gay Pride Month; they tour various Borders stores on Long Island, singing their message of hate to everyone, like it or not. It says something, not favorable to Borders, that other bookstores on the island refused to host them.

Rick Hinshaw wrote a letter to the owner of the Bohemia store, sending a copy to its headquarters in Ann Arbor, Michigan. When he received no response, William Donohue called the owner, who, in turn, referred him to headquarters. That's when the fun began.

Donohue was told that Borders believes in free speech and would never censor anyone. Donohue told the spokesman that no

one has a constitutional right to speak in any privately-owned bookstore and that Borders makes decisions every day on which books to stock: it does not make Borders a censor, he said, simply because they refuse to stock most books that come to their attention.

The Borders representative continued to say that people have a right to sing about whatever they want, using any lyrics they find appropriate. Donohue replied, "Would you allow a group to sing about blacks and gays using lyrics such as niggers and queers?" Finally, he got the point.

What happened next was an investigation of the matter by Borders. They concluded that they could not substantiate the allegations, but they also said that "We take issues such as those raised in your letter very seriously" and pledged to intervene if something like this happens again.

Had Borders not balked in the first place, perhaps things might have been different. At any rate, the only way we could get through to them was to make an analogous case that tapped their sensitivities. In other words, we have a long way to go.

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## QUOTABLE

*"The cultural elite has rejected traditional Judaism and Christianity, not out of petulance but because it holds the Bible to be immoral."*

*"We should strike directly at the worst part of today's pro-homosexual slant: We should outlaw sex education in the public schools."*

Yale professor David Gelernter, *Wall Street Journal*, August

13.

Gelernter teaches computer science, which explains why he hasn't been corrupted like those in the humanities and social sciences.

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## TYPICAL NEW YORK TIMES

In the fall 1997, the Catholic League protested a Los Angeles exhibition by Robert Gober that appeared in the Museum of Contemporary Art. The Gober display was a figure of Our Blessed Mother with a huge phallic culvert pipe piercing her abdomen. The promotional material for the exhibit said that "the culvert deprives the Virgin Mary of the womb from which Christ was born." This was bad enough, but what the *New York Times* did was at least equally reprehensible.

On November 18, 1997, the *Times* published a color photo and a lengthy article about the blasphemous display. The article had the audacity to say that the Gober "must be traveled before an informed opinion can be arrived at." In other words, everyone, Catholics included, should subject themselves to this mockery before registering an opinion.

Now the *Times* is back at it again, this time publishing a picture of the exhibit that is almost a half-page in size. The picture appeared in a lead article in the Sunday "Arts and Leisure" section on August 9. The column, which discussed installation art, chose to highlight the Gober contribution by stating that it "included suitcases, sewer grates, a Madonna and a steel drain pipe."

Pictures are published for a purpose. Given what the *New York Times* already had to say about this "art," and given its

general ideological disposition towards matters Catholic, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the message it sought to convey.

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## WHY NOT A MINISTER OR RABBI?

Reasoning by analogy is something we do at the Catholic League everyday. When we can't convince someone who has offended us that it is wrong to treat Catholics in a particular fashion, we substitute some other group for Catholics to make our point. It usually works. Here are two recent examples.

On July 15 we spotted an article in *USA Today* about two Scotsmen who were introducing a new product to America. Called Purely Cotton, the product is said to be the first bathroom tissue made solely of cotton fiber. The company, Linters, decided on a TV ad campaign that features "a boxer, soccer kids and a priest, confessing: 'I don't use toilet paper.'"

William Donohue called the marketing department of Linters about the ad and was told that the priest was a "non-denominational priest." Donohue asked whether the woman could identify priests from another religion who also hear confession, and she confessed that she could not. But she wouldn't flinch from her position, either. Donohue then asked that the clergyman clearly be identified in the ad as an Episcopal priest, stating that Linters could then explain to Episcopalians why the ad wasn't offensive. The woman said she would investigate the issue further.

When she called back, she told Donohue that he would be relieved to know that the ad doesn't feature a priest after all—it's a monk who is being depicted. When he asked why the average viewer wouldn't conclude that this was a Catholic

monk, she couldn't say. He mentioned how her latest strategy wasn't working very well, and at that she promised that someone else would be getting back to him.

The next person who called said that the president of Linters was coming to New York on business and would like to meet with Donohue. He agreed. But the day before the scheduled meeting was to be held, Donohue was notified that there was no need for the meeting as the ad had been withdrawn. Alleluia.

Then there was the case of Instant Improvement, Inc. When Catholic League member Joe Driscoll of Ohio got some unsolicited mail from the company, he forwarded it to the league. The promotional was an ad for a new "sex food," pills that supposedly make older men, and men with sexual dysfunctions, virile again. On the cover of the envelope, in big, bright red letters, it said, "The Sex Food So Potent PRIESTS WERE FORBIDDEN TO EAT IT!" It was signed, Eugene Schwartz.

When Donohue called the company asking to speak to Mr. Schwartz, he was told that the sex guru had been dead for three years. After explaining the mailing he received, he requested that the word "priest" be changed to "rabbi." He was then told that the word in question really meant "ancient priests." Donohue asked that the term "ancient rabbis" be substituted and then the company could explain to offended Jews why the ad was never meant to offend. She got the point and said it would be brought up at the next meeting of the board.

If this is the only way we can provoke a desired outcome, we will continue to do so. But it only underscores our concern: Catholic bashing is so common that many of those who sponsor it don't feel the slightest bit embarrassed for promoting it.

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# CHURCH AND STATE IN RALEIGH

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has ordered the Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, to rehire a woman whom the diocese fired as its director of music ministry; EEOC has also mandated that all diocesan employees be trained in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The diocese is refusing to cooperate saying that EEOC has no authority to make the ruling. The woman who was fired, Joyce Austin, has filed several lawsuits against the diocese since 1992, even though she continues to work there part-time.

The Catholic League's response, outlined in a news release, was as follows:

"How many times have the advocates of separation of church and state told us that churches should not encroach upon the affairs of government? But where are these same people when it is the state that encroaches upon the affairs of churches?

"It is mind-boggling that an executive agency of the federal government should try to tell a Catholic diocese who it should hire as its music director. That is why the Catholic League will now contact the offices of North Carolina Senators Jesse Helms and Lauch Faircloth, as well as Raleigh Congressman David Price. It is not the Diocese of Raleigh that needs to be disciplined, it is the zealots at the EEOC who have thrown the First Amendment to the wind."

Imagine for one moment what would happen if a diocese mandated the employment practices of a government agency? The ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and People for the American Way would go bonkers. That is why their silence on this issue is telling.



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## APOLOGY GRANTED

Following a complaint made by the Catholic League, the *San Francisco Examiner* issued an apology for publishing an offensive joke.

On June 14, in the magazine section of the newspaper, Shann Nix opened a piece on President Clinton with a joke about the pope and Clinton (they die on the same day). The joke has it that after an initial mistake, the pope is rescued from Hell and delivered to Heaven while Clinton makes the reverse trip. On the way, the two meet and the pope exclaims how he is anxious to meet the Virgin Mary. Clinton remarks that "I'm sorry to tell you this, but I'm afraid you're just one day too late."

We didn't appreciate the humor let the *San Francisco Examiner* know it. The editor of the magazine section wrote back stating that an apology would be printed, admitting that the opening "strayed far from the mark."

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## MEDIA KISS-UP TO KISSLING

Neither Frances Kissling, nor her letter-head group, Catholics for a Free Choice, are Catholic, but that means nothing to many in the media. To take the two latest examples, ABC and the *New York Times*, both media outlets seem bent on creating for Kissling what she cannot do for herself, namely, achieving credibility with Catholics.

On July 21, Peter Jennings of ABC engaged in a bit of Catholic-baiting when he exclaimed that mergers between community hospitals and Catholic hospitals raised dire warnings about “a virtual [Catholic] monopoly on health care.” In the same vein, he pondered, “What happens when a Catholic hospital is the only one around,” never questioning what happens when there is *no* hospital around.

To punctuate ABC’s misgivings over the horrible specter of hospitals refusing to kill unborn children, Jennings gave Kissling a platform to bash the Church. She did not disappoint. We let ABC News President David Westin know about our concerns.

Worse than Jennings was Nadine Brozan of the *New York Times*. In a column that questioned the pope’s latest letter asserting the Church’s authority on controversial issues, Brozan described Kissling as a “practicing Catholic.” Interestingly, in the preceding paragraph, Brozan quoted another dissident, a 28 year-old woman “who describes herself as a non-practicing Catholic.” (Why someone who does not practice his faith should be quoted about matters concerning his faith is not known.)

The Catholic League responded to Brozan asking her to demonstrate that Kissling is a “practicing Catholic.” Brozan was asked to identify the parish that Kissling belongs to, how often she attends Mass and how frequently she attends to the sacraments. “I recognize that these are private matters,” wrote William Donohue, “but when someone who is not publicly identified as a Catholic is now making such a claim, the public has a right to know the truth.”

In a future edition of *Catalyst*, we will let members know how our protest of these two media-related stories turned out.