

CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISTS SEEK BAN ON QURAN

The Family Policy Network, a Virginia-based activist organization, filed suit in federal district court over the summer challenging the right of the University of North Carolina to require incoming freshmen to read selections from the Quran. The organization holds that the book, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, should not be assigned summer reading because it infringes on the students' First Amendment right to religious freedom.

After the initial protest, the university agreed to make the reading optional (requiring students who object to write a one-page paper stating their objections), but this only infuriated the Family Policy Network.

The Catholic League did not agree with the conservative activist group and made a public statement to the media expressing our concerns. Here is the text of our remarks:

"There is a fundamental difference between indoctrination and education. It is the difference between proselytization and illumination. It is one thing to demand that students accept the teachings of a world religion, quite another to understand them. This is why the University of North Carolina is wholly within its rights in requiring students to read selections from the Quran: no one is being forced to yield his conscience to the Islamic faith.

"Professors who teach a course in Comparative Religions may rightly require students to read portions of the Old and New Testaments. They may decide to assign the Torah or selections from the Catholic Catechism. But according to the logic advanced by the Family Policy Network, this would negate the First Amendment rights of students. They have it backwards:

the First Amendment rights of students are abrogated when they are denied their free speech rights to read the actual teachings of world religions.

“When the University of North Carolina made the reading optional, the response from Family Policy Network president Joe Glover was to liken this to ‘something you’d see in Nazi Germany.’ This kind of hyperbole is the mark of a zealot. We’ll be glad when the university wins in court.”

PLAYBOY UNEARTHS BOBBLEHEAD EX-PRIEST

The September issue of *Playboy* features an article by an ex-Jesuit priest, Charles J. O’Byrne, on his tortured experience with the Catholic Church.

We took the occasion to comment to the press that “There’s nothing worse than an embittered Irish Catholic who is at war with the Church.” Indeed, we said, “O’Byrne is only the latest to join this losers’ club.” This explains why we dubbed him “a Bobblehead of an ex-priest” (the reference is to the bouncing-head miniature dolls made of famous persons).

In his article, O’Byrne made clear his hatred of the Church’s teachings on celibacy, contraception, fornication, homosexuality, etc. He even conjectured that Jesus, Joseph and Mary had sex. Regarding Jesus, he offered what he no doubt considered to be a particularly profound remark, commenting, “Jesus liked women and they liked him.”

Bobblehead also blamed Saint Augustine and Irish Catholicism for promoting sexual repression; he even said natural law was

another force for sexual repression. If the next pope doesn't get with it, he remarked, the U.S. church will break with Rome. Or so he wishes.

In our news release, we mentioned that there was an illustration accompanying the article that showed a man kneeling under the robes of a priest with his face at the priest's genitals. "This provides more evidence that the piece is not a contribution to critical analysis," we said, "but to hate speech."

Our final observation dealt with the source of the article and with the author himself. "Playboy," we opined, "is a rather curious choice of publications for an article like this. Moreover, the author has never published before and has no institutional affiliation. But what Playboy and Bobblehead have in common is a vested interest in maligning the Catholic Church. This is surely not a marriage made in heaven."

BILL O'REILLY BLASTS THE POPE

The "O'Reilly Factor" show that aired July 30 on the Fox News Channel saw host Bill O'Reilly blast Pope John Paul II for not meeting with the victims of priestly sexual molestation in Toronto. He complained that the pope would not even allow 30 minutes to meet with the survivors.

O'Reilly also said he could not believe that Jesus would have acted this way. The Church, he offered, has lost its moral authority and will not recover in his lifetime. O'Reilly maintained that by not meeting with the victims, the pope showed a "lack of compassion." Nothing less than a "reform" pope will resolve the problem, he said.

We generally like Bill O'Reilly. But lately he's had a tendency to go over the top. Like him or not, the Catholic League has long prided itself in being fair and balanced so we couldn't hold back when O'Reilly went ballistic on the pope.

We found it rather amazing that simply because Pope John Paul II did not meet with sex abuse victims while in Toronto, O'Reilly would conclude that this was evidence that the pope lacked compassion. Nothing short of a "reform pope," O'Reilly said, will rescue the Catholic Church. We labeled such an analysis as madness. Some quick research on our part revealed that O'Reilly's take on the pope was nothing if not unique: he stood all alone in his convictions. This is why we issued the following statement to the press:

"O'Reilly is the only public person in the United States to register this complaint. Not one editorial from the establishment press made this criticism. Not one morning TV news commentary, or evening news statement, took the pope to task for not meeting with the victims. Not one victims' group adopted this line. Not one activist organization, or pundit, took this position. Just Bill O'Reilly."

We then compared O'Reilly's harsh criticisms to a news report by Frank Bruni in the *New York Times*. Here is how Bruni saw it: "His [the pope's] remarks were striking in several ways. The word shame represented stronger, more personal language than the pope had used this year about sexual abuse by priests. Equally significant were the context and setting of the pope's brief discussion of the issue." It is a wonder Bill O'Reilly didn't see what Bruni did.

It is also worth keeping in mind that the bishops met with representatives of victims' groups. And Gov. Frank Keating, who heads the oversight panel, met with them. But none of this was good enough for Bill O'Reilly. He demanded that the pope rearrange his trip so the media circus could commence.

PARTING SHOTS AT BILL MAHER

Catholic League members know that we have stayed on the back of bigot-comedian Bill Maher for years. It was only fitting, then, that we offered some parting shots when we learned that his show was to be thrown off the air over the summer. Here's how we said goodbye:

"Over the years we have had a good time reading the enfeebled responses of ABC officials defending Maher's anti-Catholicism. In October 1998, we learned that 'the program goes to great lengths to make sure they offend as many groups as possible.' In point of fact, Maher is not an equal-opportunity offender: in his May 24 interview with Larry King, Maher, who was raised Catholic and is half-Jewish, dumped on Catholics while speaking emphatically about the plight of Jews and blacks. Just like he did on his show for years.

"In November, 1999, we were told 'The aim of this program is to question the standards by which our society draws lines of tastes and otherwise stratifies itself and categorizes the behavior of its citizens.' Not true. The aim of the show is to bash those whom it is not politically incorrect to do so. Like Catholics.

"In August, 2000, we were informed that 'Mr. Maher and the producers of the show regularly push the limits of the envelope to encourage examination of societal norms.' Not so. If this were true, Maher would have regularly pushed gay hot buttons by examining why so many of them engage in AIDS-producing behavior at AIDS fund-raising events.

"In January, 2001, we were told the show is

‘cutting edge.’ But there is nothing ‘cutting edge’ about a show that appeals to the most debased appetites in society. By this logic, Jerry Springer is a genius.

“In the King exchange, Maher was serious when he admitted, ‘I think religion is bad and drugs are good.’ He also said ‘If you want to kill yourself, kill yourself. I’m pro-death.’ This explains everything. Now we know what makes him tick. He needs our prayers.”

TV’S NEW SEASON BEGINS

Television’s new season is about to begin and there are a few shows that bear watching—not from an entertainment point of view, but from the perspective of the Catholic League.

CBS is going to air a four-hour miniseries about Hitler. It will deal with his early life and rise to power and will also explore the social and political environment in which the Fuehrer operated. The miniseries is based on the work of historian Ian Kershaw. He has authored two volumes on the subject, one of which, *Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris*, is the basis of the TV production.

We mention this only because we’re leery about any portrayal coming out of Hollywood these days that may touch on the role of Pope Pius XII. If the CBS adaptation is a fair-minded account of Kershaw’s book, we should have nothing to worry about. A review in *First Things* comments that “Kershaw assigns the churches only a minor role.” We should therefore see little mention of Catholicism. But as we said, we’re leery.

Sometime in the next year there will be a four-hour miniseries on CBS titled "Master Spy: The Robert Hanssen Story." We have two concerns: 1) will the show be used as a club to beat Catholicism? and 2) the show is based on a controversial source—a book of investigations by Norman Mailer and Lawrence Shiller.

Into the Mirror: The Life of Master Spy Robert P. Hanssen has been described as "a fictionalized retelling" that is "intellectually undemanding but still delivers some voyeuristic thrills." No doubt it does. In a recent account of the miniseries, it says of Hanssen that "For 22 years he was a loving husband, a devoted father of six, a deeply devout Catholic, a passionate anti-communist, a dedicated FBI agent and, at the same time, a traitor the likes of which the United States had never seen before."

This description is loaded. Now add to this the fact that Hanssen was a member of Opus Dei and the result is a script ripe for exploitation. Keep your eyes on this one but don't hold your breath for a show on Jonathan Pollard, the Jewish American spy for Israel. He's not colorful enough.

The fall lineup has an NBC offering, "American Dreams," that is set in 1963. The show tells the story of a teenage girl who dreams of getting on "American Bandstand," the ABC dance show that was hosted by Dick Clark. "She's a 15 year old from a good Catholic family with a stern dad," says one review. The girl's father, the show reveals, initially banned her from dancing on the show. It makes us wonder why the family wasn't cast as Baptist.

The creator of "American Dreams" is Jonathan Prince. Here's how he characterizes the show: "We idealize the '60s. It wasn't more innocent. People were having sex. Catholic women were using birth control and not talking about it." Now how about them apples! Is there anyone east of Hollywood who could improve on that? We'll be sure to tape this one.

ABC will air “Miracles” this fall, a show about a man who studies for the priesthood and leaves before taking his vows. From what we’ve learned, the seminarian is engaged in a personal search for God but found “the church is extraneous and even a hurdle in the spiritual quest.” Another report says the show is a “spiritual X-Files” where “the hero parts company with the church hierarchy because he feels its leaders do not really believe in miracles.”

“Good Morning Miami” is being released by NBC and features “an ultra-zany nun named Sister Brenda.” The good sister is the weathercaster on a local morning show. She opens her forecasts with such lines as, “I have it on good authority...” But there is also a dark side to Sister Brenda. When she learns that her managers may let her go, she tells one of them to “blow it out your —.”

Brooke Dillman plays Sister Brenda. When she was reminded recently that the Catholic League made life miserable for ABC when it aired “Nothing Sacred,” she responded by saying that the nun character is “just a little feisty.” She then asked the reporter if he agreed. “Sure,” came the reply. “But then, I’m not the Catholic League.” Smart guy.

Perhaps there’s nothing to worry about and all will be fine. Nonetheless, the Catholic League is a watchdog agency and we have every intention of monitoring these shows.

JANE MAGAZINE FOOLS NO ONE

The August edition of *Jane* magazine featured a satirical article about how people can use the same tactics as pedophile priests to have casual sex. Titled “How to get laid like a

priest," the article contained a disclaimer asserting it was targeting only pedophile priests, not the Church in general. The accompanying photographs showed a storefront and a display counter of a sex shop with Catholic imagery added, including a priest blow-up doll.

We didn't care for their sense of humor and consequently put out a news release on the magazine. "Despite the disclaimer," we noted, "the article, written by Jeffrey Johnson, is nothing short of an attack on the Catholic faith. Holy Communion, Confession, Baptism and celibacy are all targeted for ridicule."

We were particularly disturbed by what was said of Our Blessed Mother. Johnson wrote "The Bible is full of stuff about seas parting, water turning into wine and women getting pregnant without penetration—topics that, if mentioned on daytime TV, would get you taunted by the audience." He then described the crucifix as an image "of a nude bearded dude nailed to a couple of pieces of driftwood." None of this, of course, has anything to do with pedophile priests.

We pointed out that if indeed Jane wanted to satirize the scandal in the Church, "it could have done so by attacking homosexual priests who are responsible for 82% of the cases. But that would have evoked cries of homophobia from those in the social pages where editor-in-chief Jane Pratt can usually be found. Instead, Johnson seizes on the few cases of pedophilia and uses them as a guise to attack the entire Church."

RADIO HOST DISCIPLINED

On July 25, radio show host John Ziegler treated his listeners on WHAS in Louisville, Kentucky, to an extended diatribe on Catholicism. He managed to lambaste celibacy, the sacraments, and Church teachings. But he saved his biggest guns for an attack on the Eucharist.

Ziegler opined how “freaky somebody has to be to become a priest when celibacy is required among the priesthood to be a priest.” Regarding Mass, he said it was arguably “the biggest news story that is being ignored every single Sunday—that someone is taking food and turning it into God and then eating it—or the Catholic Church is lying about that.” He also commented, “That a group of people, priests, that think they have the ability to say a marriage never existed, that that group of people would have a scandal like they’re currently embroiled in right now. That to me is not mysterious at all.” Etc.

On August 1, we filed a complaint with the general manager of WHAS. On August 13 he replied, “We have received quite a bit of feedback on this program from local Catholics in the Louisville area.” He proceeded to say that after speaking to Ziegler, “it bears noting that neither the Catholic Church, nor the recent scandals, have been mentioned on the John Ziegler Show since that date.” Putting the matter in context, he told us that “You may not be aware that Mr. Ziegler has only been a member of our staff for about a month now, and had only been on the air for a week at the time of the July 25th program.”

CHEAP SHOTS ON "SEX AND THE CITY"

On July 28, the HBO show "Sex and the City" aired an episode that was dotted with cheap shots at Catholicism. The episode, "Unoriginal Sin," featured Sarah Jessica Parker playing Carrie Bradshaw; Carrie is also the show's narrator. Viewers also meet Miranda, an unmarried non-Catholic mother of a newborn. Her boyfriend wants to baptize the child so as to please his Catholic mother; she is depicted as an Irish drunk who is afraid her grandchild might go to hell.

Miranda reluctantly agrees to the baptism but insists that there be no mention of Christianity or Satan. At this point in the program, Carrie the narrator chimes in saying, "Miranda was surprised the priest was so flexible. But the truth is, in these troubled times, the Catholic Church is like a desperate 36-year-old single woman, willing to settle for anything it can get." The child's mother then quips, "It's one less bath I have to give him."

These are troubled times for the Catholic Church. But it is wrong to think that the Church is so desperate it will sell its soul to survive. That may be the way it's done in Tinsel Town—some would sell their own mother's grave to get ahead—but the Catholic Church is modeled on Heaven, not Hollywood.

In any event, members should know that Sarah Jessica Parker is also the show's executive producer; it's fair to conclude she doesn't like us. We are grateful to our friend in the Jewish community, radio talk show host Steve Malzberg, who wrote a column blasting the show. Many thanks, too, for Steve's kind words of support for the

“SOUTH PARK” SHOWS COWARDICE

Over the summer, Comedy Central spent a lot of time promoting a particular episode of “South Park.” The promo for the show that aired July 3 boasted that this is one “the Catholic Church doesn’t want you to see.” Not surprisingly, this episode targeted the sex abuse scandal in the Church. The promo featured a bishop standing in front of the pope complaining, “we’ll never be able to have sex with boys again.”

The promo was enough for us to make public our remarks. Here is what we told the media:

“One of the biggest myths in Hollywood is the notion that ‘South Park’ creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker have the guts to take on controversial subjects. Already, some pundits are congratulating Stone and Parker for doing an episode on the scandal in the Catholic Church. But the way Stone and Parker have decided to approach the subject shows cowardice, not courage.

“The promo is dishonest. The scandal in the Church is not about priests having sex with prepubescent boys. It is about priests having sex with postpubescent young men. The former is called pedophilia and the latter is called homosexuality. So if Stone and Parker really had guts, they would do a show on gay priests. But, of course, like so many other intellectually dishonest elites in our society, they will go to any length to protect homosexuals.

“It is worth noting that in a recent survey

conducted by the Washington Post—extending back four decades and covering 60,000 priests—it was disclosed that less than 1.5 percent of the priests were involved in sexual misconduct with minors. It is also worth noting that the 2 percent of our society which is homosexual accounts for over half the AIDS cases in this country. Now if the statistic on priests merits an episode on ‘South Park,’ it is fair to ask why the figures on gays and AIDS don’t merit a whole season of fun? But like I said, Stone and Parker are cowards, and that explains why they’ll never air a show on the homosexual contribution to AIDS.”

LEGALISMS FAIL TO PERSUADE

The spring edition of Law and Courts, a newsletter published by the American Political Science Association (APSA), contained an article on a judge often touted as a possible Supreme Court nominee. Of Judge Emilio Garza it was said that he “is single, is a devout Catholic and is said to regularly attend Mass during his lunch hour. Associates report that he maintains a ‘priestly’ bearing in the courtroom...”

When we challenged the editor of the newsletter on this, Professor C. Neal Tate of the University of North Texas, he fell back on legalisms. He contended that the author speaks only for himself and that neither he nor the APSA should be held accountable. Which makes us wonder why so few people these days have an aversion to the truth.