

# TAKING ON THE HEAVYWEIGHTS

William A. Donohue

Six years ago, on July 1, 1993, I took over as president of the Catholic League. When I began, I routinely had to explain to reporters who we were. Now we get calls, on a daily basis, from Los Angeles to London, asking for an interview. And when I read the *Los Angeles Times*, I find statements like the one of June 18: "The dispute between the powerful Catholic League and Miramax...has heated up."

Are we powerful? Not powerful enough is what I say, for if we had the power that some attribute to us we would be out of business. But the reality is that anti-Catholicism is alive and well. This is not to say, however, that we aren't having an effect. Just read the story in this issue about the Fox response to Catholic League members over "The Simpsons." Or consider what *USA Today* reported following the showing of "Dogma" at Cannes, France: "It's not Catholic people but the Catholic League that Miramax co-chief Harvey Weinstein is concerned about"; this was said at an in-the-street impromptu news conference.

First take "The Simpsons." Over the past year, we ran several stories on how this cartoon series continues to trash Catholics. We've written letters and have listed the name and address of who to contact; we even put this on the front page of our March edition of *Catalyst*. Now look what **you've** done.

Those of you who took the time to write a letter were the ones who turned the tide. This is not my opinion, rather it is the position as expressed by Fox. They were flooded with letters, and it just got to be too much for them, so they put out the word—lay off Catholics.

I hope this convinces our letter writers that your work is not in vain. Just as important, I hope it convinces those of you

who have been meaning to write a letter, but never seem to get around to it, that it is worth the time and effort to get involved. It can't be said too strongly—letters count.

The hate mail we received over the news that the Catholic League prevailed at Fox was amazing. Think about what's going on. Here we have people, plenty of them, who can't wait to express their hatred of the Catholic League, all because we pressured Fox to knock it off. What they are saying, in essence, is that we Catholics deserve all the bigotry we get. In short, they hate us.

Turning to "Dogma," the attempt by the attorneys for the Weinsteins (the lawyer who wrote to us is the Petrocelli who represented the victim's families in the O.J. civil case) was a monumental flop. It not only failed to intimidate me, it emboldened me (as always, I got splendid advice from our General Counsel, Patrick Foye). Never will anyone intimidate the Catholic League from speaking out in defense of the Catholic Church. Never. It just gets my Irish back up even more when bigots try (it drives Pat nuts, too).

One of the more curious things about the threatening-letter fiasco was its timing. On April 8, I replied to actor Ben Affleck's revealing statement that "The movie ['Dogma'] is definitely meant to push buttons." My reply was that "The Catholic League has a few buttons of its own to push, and we will not hold back."

Now why would a high-powered law firm from L.A. wait until June 15 to send me an Overnight Priority Federal Express letter about some innocuous statement I made over two months earlier? When asked by the *Boston Globe* to explain the time gap, I told the reporter that the only thing I had done about "Dogma" since April was on June 15: that was the day that the lawyers for the *New York Times* saw my op-ed ad for June 23 (they had to approve it)—the ad that appeals to Disney to dump Miramax. The threatening letter arrived in my office the next

day, June 16. Curious, isn't it?

There is nothing wrong with a good clean fight. But when one fighter accuses the other of things that are patently absurd, and tries to take the fighter out by hitting below the belt, then that is a different story. That's cheating. It should go without saying that we will continue to be responsibly aggressive, even if the other side doesn't play by the rules.

Those of us who work at the Catholic League have been called more names, and have been bombarded with more hate mail, than I care to discuss. But the good news is that these filthy-mouthed bigots aren't winning. You should see all the fantastic mail we get from our supporters, men and women just like you. The number of priests, nuns, religious and lay people who support us—with prayers, praise and donations—is unbelievable. It is for you that we continue to fight the good fight.

We're taking on the heavyweights and we're winning. So please sign the petition that calls for Disney to dump Miramax. Remember, petitions, like letters, count.