

THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE AT 30

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Were it not for Father Virgil Blum, there would have been no Catholic League. A Jesuit professor of political science at Marquette University, Father Blum founded the Catholic League in 1973 as an anti-defamation organization. The organization's goal is in its title: religious and civil rights.

From the beginning, the Catholic League has made anti-Catholicism its focus. While it is true that discrimination against Catholics has declined over the past 30 years, it is also true that defamation against the institutional Church has increased. It does not exaggerate to say that the Catholic Church is maligned today with greater force than any institution in society. It is the Church's teachings, especially on sexual ethics, that is the source of so much contempt. That those who lead the fight consider themselves to be educated and tolerant is the real irony.

The Catholic League was born in a time of societal upheaval. Abortion, always a moral monstrosity, became a social and legal monstrosity in 1973. Consider that the plaintiff, Jane Roe (a.k.a. Norma McCorvey), lied when she said she was raped and was in need of an abortion (which she never had). Consider that nowhere in the Constitution is there even a hint that abortion was to be among the fundamental rights guaranteed by the federal government; it was literally made up out of whole cloth. But consider this as well: Norma McCorvey has since become pro-life and has converted to Catholicism.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) declared that homosexuality was no longer a mental illness. Like Roe v. Wade, it, too, was politically motivated: there was no new evidence that homosexuality was a normal variant of sexuality; what happened was that the APA succumbed to pressure politics

organized by an aggressive gay lobby. Like the abortion ruling, the normalization of homosexuality has been marked by a trail of despair and death.

The word Watergate entered the lexicon as a synonym for corruption in 1973. Like the abortion ruling and the homosexual decision, it smacked of politics and dirty play. It was launched by a bunch of two-bit players guilty of breaking and entering in search of two-bit information. That they would bring down the man they sought to prop up was the final irony.

This was the climate in which the Catholic League was born. It was a milieu in which a crisis of authority had hit the courts, professional associations, presidential politics and beyond. Now, 30 years later, it is the moral authority of the Catholic Church that is being questioned.

The sexual abuse scandal has activated the Catholic League more than any event in its 30-year history. We are here to defend the Church against wrongdoing, but we are not here to defend wrongdoing done by the Church. Having said that, it must be emphasized that our central role in this issue is to combat those who seek to exploit the scandal. This has certainly kept us busy.

Who are those who seek to exploit the scandal? Essentially, it comes down to two groups: anti-Catholics and Catholics with an agenda.

Scandals of all sorts happen all the time and to all segments of society. They do not, by themselves, turn friends into enemies; nor do they make the indifferent into foes. What they do is make it easier for the enemy to surface in full-frontal fashion. That is why anti-Catholic bigots are coming out of the woodwork these days: they were always there, it's just that now they have some cover.

Those with an agenda are Catholic malcontents. Unhappy because the Church has not adopted a radical agenda, they now seek to

impose their sexual politics on the rest of us. They want to blanket Catholics from the Vatican to Vermont with their morally bankrupt ideas and think the time is ripe to charge forward. They do not care if they hurt the Church in the meantime, and that is because they have no more use for the Catholic Church than do the bigots.

If there is a difference between Catholic bashers and agenda-driven Catholics, it is that the latter contend they love what the Church stands for in principle. But they fail to persuade. To proclaim love for what the Church is supposed to be, while maintaining an unyielding hatred of all things Catholic, is like telling your neighbor how much you might like him if he were to dramatically change while loathing him for being what he is.

The Catholic League at 30 has its work cut out for itself. It was born in a time of moral crisis and has survived through three decades of moral anarchy. But unlike 1973, the major crisis today is the ability of the Catholic Church to rebound from self-inflicted wounds. It is the job of the Catholic League to help facilitate this process by warding off the Church's enemies. Father Blum wouldn't have wanted it any other way, and we are determined not to let him down.