

# The Church Scandal: Fodder for State Meddling

by William A. Donohue

(Catalyst 4/2003)

The sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church is being used by state lawmakers to crack the wall of separation of church and state. Unless this is resisted by the hierarchy of the Church, state meddling in the internal workings of the Church will grow.

One of the more conspicuous examples is the willingness of some state legislators to undermine the confidentiality of the confessional by revoking the traditional priest-penitent privilege. They say this must be done in order to protect children: by breaking the seal of the confessional, it is argued, priests would have to disclose information concerning the sexual abuse of minors. But this is a fatally flawed argument and it is being advanced by hypocrites.

There is no evidence to suggest that by ending the confidentiality of the confessional children will be protected. This is a red herring. To begin, let's put the issue into perspective.

A study by the *Washington Post* revealed that less than 1.5 percent of priests over the past 40 years have been accused of sexually molesting a minor. *The New York Times* did a study as well, covering the years 1950 to 2001: it put the figure at 1.8 percent. Currently, less than one percent of priests nationwide are under investigation. While one priest would be too many, it is important to remember that scholars who have studied this issue (Penn State's Philip Jenkins comes quickly to mind) have determined that the incidence of abuse by priests does not differ from that of the clergy of other

religions, and may even be lower.

The overwhelming majority of those abused are postpubescent males—they are not children. Breaking the seal of the confessional could not have saved any of them; nor will it protect anyone in the future. Let's remember a few basic facts.

The seal of the confessional does not apply to the penitent. If someone confesses knowledge of abuse to a priest, there is nothing to stop him from contacting the authorities. Nor is there something that would prevent the priest from asking such a penitent to discuss this further in his office, thereby freeing the priest from his confessional vows. The priest could also withhold absolution until such time as the authorities were notified. In short, there are ways a priest can fulfill his duties without sacrificing anyone.

Another problem with attempts to break the seal of the confessional is the grave implications it has for the First Amendment. Freedom of religion, and the establishment clause which keeps church and state separate, will not mean much if the state is permitted to encroach on the Church's doctrinal prerogatives. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not something the state can be allowed to trespass upon without doing irreparable harm to Catholicism. It would be a violation of separation of church and state of grave magnitude, having wide implications for all religions. Nothing would be sacrosanct.

Then there is also the problem of unenforceability. How could the state possibly know whether a priest has learned of sexual abuse in the confessional? The priest is certainly not going to say. In the event the penitent calls the cops after revealing such knowledge, and the priest is questioned about what he knows, he could simply refuse to discuss anything he learned in the confessional. What are they going to do, put him in handcuffs? Will the police wire the confessional? All of this is nonsense.

Hypocrisy is fueling this issue as well. There is no push being made to end the attorney-client privilege, just the priest-penitent privilege. Yet are we to believe that lawyers learn less about the sexual abuse of minors in confidential discussions than do priests? Moreover, the public has little regard for lawyers as a group: a Harris survey in October, 2001 revealed that as a profession, attorneys have "hardly any prestige at all." They finished in a tie for last place with union leaders; doctors were first.

Another hypocritical element in this is the failure of the media to discuss why mandatory sexual abuse reporting bills are being held up in the states. It is not the fault of the bishops. It is the fault of Planned Parenthood and the ACLU.

Planned Parenthood staffers find out about cases of statutory rape on a regular basis, yet they report almost none of them. We know this to be true because a sting operation conducted by a pro-life group recently reported as much. The lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood, Family Planning Advocates, has been trying to ward off any bill that would blanket all professionals equally. What they want to do is keep the exemption for abortion providers while ending the exemption for the clergy. And their friends in the ACLU are working with them, providing legal cover.

Getting the priests is what this game is all about; it has nothing to do with protecting children. That it is being done without much of an uproar from Catholic circles is disturbing. A happy exception to this is Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington.

When the Maryland legislature was contemplating a bill requiring priests to report cases of suspected child abuse learned in the confessional, Cardinal McCarrick rightly got his back up. He quickly denounced the bill and publicly stated that he would gladly go to jail before ever breaking the seal of the confessional. We immediately supported him, as did

others. And the result? The bullies backed off and dropped the bill.

There is another lesson to be learned here. Not only was Cardinal McCarrick's leadership indispensable to this effort, it won the admiration of those not generally in our corner. For example, an editorial in the pages of the *Washington Post* took note of McCarrick's determination. "As one of the most responsible bishops during the sex abuse scandal," the editorial said, "the archbishop of Washington should be taken seriously when he takes such a passionate stand."

What this goes to show is that our side needs to do more than dialogue. Too often dialogue is a recipe for paralysis. There are some things so fundamental—like breaking the confessional seal—that no amount of conversation is going to matter. What matters is playing hardball. That's what wins and that's what earns respect. There is no need to play dirty, but there is every reason to play to win.

Catholics need to check another abuse by lawmakers: far-ranging subpoenas of sensitive documents must end. For example, there is no doubt that some are using the scandal as a pretext to read internal Church memos, priest personnel files and the like. If there is something specific that is needed, that is one thing. But the mass collection of records is quite another. What is so obscene about this is that no other profession is being treated this way. Why not grab the files on members of the clergy from other religions as well? Why limit it to the clergy? Why not obtain the personnel files of teachers, psychologists, social workers, et al.?

Another way some states are playing fast and loose with the Catholic Church these days is by rescinding laws governing the statute of limitations as it applies to the abuse of a minor. It cannot be said too many times that this long-standing provision in law was formulated to protect the rights of the accused from those with fading memories. Moreover, witnesses

may die or cannot be located. No one can really be safe from reckless charges if decades after an alleged offense occurred, the state is going to prosecute alleged offenders.

Impaneling grand juries is another game to watch. What is the purpose of establishing a grand jury knowing that the statute of limitations has run its course? This is what was done on Long Island. Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota impaneled a grand jury knowing full well he could not produce one indictment.

What Spota did was a disgrace. He spent the taxpayers' money on a fishing expedition. He never cross-examined the witnesses, nor did he allow officials from the Diocese of Rockville Centre to testify. He refused to release the names of the jurors and he deliberately leaked a copy of his report to the local newspaper, *Newsday*, before the Diocese of Rockville Centre had a chance to respond. And when I wrote to him asking him to support a bill in New York State that would cover abortion providers, as well as members of the clergy, he failed to respond.

Some of the attorneys involved in bringing the lawsuits against the dioceses are suspect players themselves. Jeffrey Anderson likes to sue the Catholic Church more than anyone in the nation. He aims high—he would like to bring down the Vatican and is not shy about using the infamous RICO law to do so. He has also made quite a living off of this: he has made an estimated \$20 million suing the Catholic Church.

None of this is to say that Church officials have always conducted themselves with honor. Some have not. But it is to say that Catholics would do well to keep their guard up during times like these. There is a lot to exploit at the moment and there is no shortage of mean-spirited persons ready to do so. The role of the Catholic League in all this is to come to the aid of the Church when it is under fire. We have been busy writing to state legislators about many of these issues. We

have taken the opportunity to debate these issues on television and radio, informing the public what is at stake. For the most part, we have been received well.

Unless we beat back overly aggressive lawmakers and trial lawyers at this time, we will pay for it down the road. The scandal should never have happened, but it did. What should not be allowed to happen next is for the Church to be hammered by those who seek to meddle in the Church's internal affairs.

---

### **SUPREME COURT AFFIRMS RIGHTS OF PRO-LIFE ACTIVISTS**

It was a great victory for abortion protesters. Thanks to pro-life activist Joe Scheidler, it will now be easier for those opposed to abortion to exercise their First Amendment rights.

On February 26, the U.S. Supreme Court in an 8-1 decision ruled that the federal Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, as well as the Hobbs Act, do not apply to abortion foes who protest outside abortion clinics.

Not only will abortion protesters be free from the threat of future RICO suits, but protesters of all causes will not have to labor under such threats. If there are clear cases of harassment or abuse of women seeking an abortion by abortion protesters, then there are plenty of laws on the books that can be used against them. But to use a remedy like RICO, or the Hobbs Act, both of which were meant to apply to gangsters engaged in extortion, as a way to protect abortion-seeking women from being intimidated by protesters, is outrageous.

"The real story here," we told the press, "is the extraordinary disrespect that the so-called champions of liberty have for free speech." The National Organization for Women, which brought the lawsuit, has proven beyond a doubt that it would use any law available as a weapon to beat down pro-life protesters. NARAL and Planned Parenthood have

similarly shown their contempt for the First Amendment by previously supporting the use of RICO against anti-abortion demonstrators; even affiliates of the ACLU have used RICO to stop the free speech of abortion foes. We explained our reasoning by saying, "That's because abortion is their god: they would rather lose our fundamental civil liberties before they would ever lose the right of a woman to abort her baby."

Pro-life activists, many of whom are Catholic, can be proud of this victory. Even those who are not pro-life but still maintain fidelity to the First Amendment can feel a sigh of relief. "Most important," we concluded, "for the abortion-rights industry to try to muzzle the free speech of demonstrators by manipulating a law aimed at gangsters shows who the real fanatics are."

---

### **FAITH-BASED CARE ACT MAKES SENSE**

On January 21, the six Democratic contenders for the presidency appeared at a NARAL Pro-Choice America event celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*.

The following day, the actual anniversary date of the abortion ruling, NARAL president Kate Michelman and Planned Parenthood president Gloria Feldt held a press conference in Washington on abortion rights. One of the participating organizations at the press conference was Catholics for a Free Choice, headed by Frances Kissling.

We told media that one of the founders of NARAL was Dr. Bernard Nathanson. He converted a number of years ago to the pro-life side and even became a Catholic. Nathanson has admitted in great detail the anti-Catholic roots of NARAL: lying about the Church, fabricating data and demonizing Catholicism were an integral part of NARAL's strategy. Over the years NARAL may have become more careful about expressing

its hostility to the Catholic Church, but it is still not to be trusted. Be that as it may, one person who continues to exercise no such caution is Kissling.

Kissling has not shied away from making her anti-Catholicism public. Indeed, she wears it proudly on her sleeve. That is why so many Catholics are outraged by the refusal of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to drop Kissling's group as a link on its website.

Our statement to the media left no doubts about our resolve in dealing with this issue: "There can be no more room for both Catholics and anti-Catholics in the Democratic party than there can be for both African Americans and white supremacists. That is why the Catholic League will not let go of this issue: the DNC must stop its association with anti-Catholicism and Democratic aspirants to the presidency must address this issue."

This is an unseemly coalition—Democratic candidates for the presidency joining with the advocates of partial-birth abortion and anti-Catholicism. We look for some brave voices in the media to start asking these men some really tough questions about this issue. The public has a right to know their thoughts on the Kissling connection and no one has a right to know more than Catholics.

---

### **BILL O'REILLY GETS IN OVER HIS HEAD**

Many people admire Bill O'Reilly for his aggressive style and his emphasis on "no-spin" reporting. He delights in being a contrarian. It is also well known that O'Reilly is a Catholic, and in discussions of Catholicism he often gets in over his head, as he does while opining on other subjects. Lately O'Reilly has picked up the pace on his criticism of the Church; many members of the league have complained, and we have been monitoring the situation.



Initially, O'Reilly lashed out but covered himself, often by distancing himself from his commentary or by withdrawing some of his barbs. For example, the following remarks are excerpted from the March 5 broadcast of the "Radio Factor" on Westwood 1. O'Reilly criticized the Church for its stance on the conflict with Iraq, and attempted to discredit the Church's position by referring to the recent sex abuse crisis. While we have taken issue with such tactics before, O'Reilly was quick to soften the blow of one statement by lamenting the fact: "The Catholic Church in America has no question lost its moral authority. And that is, I hate to say it, that is the truth." In addition, he put criticism of the Church in other people's mouths: "So, you know, people who aren't Catholic are saying, well, you know, 'Look—you're letting little kids get brutalized, and you're not doing anything about it. Why should we listen to you about anything?'" And again, he toned down the comment by noting his own regret: "And that's unfortunately the prevailing wisdom."

O'Reilly was quick to point out that his point of view is not that of someone outside the Church: "Now the day of prayer and fasting on Ash Wednesday, I'm for that." He quotes from the Catechism and cites it as a valid source of guidance. But he tried to refute the pope's position by comparing it to that of Pope Pius XII, what he called a "very eerie parallel." Although he claimed to have "investigated this fairly extensively," his history was not quite accurate. O'Reilly said that the Vatican "at that time basically didn't do anything either.... And so the pope at that time came under a tremendous amount of criticism for basically allowing Hitler to basically be aggressive without the Catholic Church taking a stand against the Third Reich."

Catholic League members know that this is a canard, and O'Reilly backed down from his statement a moment later, admitting that the pope "did criticize Hitler; it's on the record." O'Reilly offered further defense of Pius XII's

position: "If Pope Pius had done anything aggressive, Mussolini would have shut him down." And he admitted that Pius XII did good work during the war, for instance, by providing safe houses for refugees.

Speaking on the current pope, he blurted out, "I have never liked this pope. I have always felt he was an autocrat who had no vision about how people live in the real world"; but he quickly noted that John Paul II "survived the Nazis," and later stated self-deprecatingly, "I couldn't really even clean the restroom of the pope."

O'Reilly often overshot his mark, only to cover himself by semi-retractions; he could then point to his moderating comments when people criticize his more uncontrolled statements. His very deliberate style is frustrating. This is not to say that O'Reilly is free from blame; his "no-spin zone" doesn't always live up to the name.

The final straw came on the March 15 broadcast of the Fox News Network's "The O'Reilly Factor." O'Reilly criticized Pope John Paul II for not having "a position on Saddam [Hussein]." After commenting on the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime, O'Reilly said, "And then the pope sits in Rome and says, gee, this is terrible, but does not throw his moral authority behind removing this dictator." At this point the league could no longer ignore O'Reilly's rhetoric and so issued the following news release:

"Bill O'Reilly has made no secret about his contempt for Pope John Paul II. On his radio show on March 5 he explicitly said, 'I have never liked this pope. I have always felt he was an autocrat who had no vision about how people live in the real world.' Now he is implying that the Holy Father is giving a wink and a nod to Saddam Hussein.

"O'Reilly's ramblings about the pope do not make him an anti-Catholic. But it does make him an ignoramus. The pope does not

have a 'position' on Saddam Hussein anymore than he has one on George W. Bush. But he does have a position on the culture of death and all that it represents. Indeed, there is no one in the world who has more forthrightly addressed issues like genocide, torture, abortion and the like than Pope John Paul II. For O'Reilly to suggest that the pope is soft on Saddam is scurrilous.

"Just last Saturday Fidel Castro presided over the inauguration of a new convent of nuns in Cuba. He did so as a fitting tribute to the fifth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba. Now it will no doubt come as a tremendous shock to Bill O'Reilly to learn that the pope was able to accomplish this without ever having a position on Fidel Castro. Come to think of it, the pope never had a position on any of the Soviet Union's officials, yet even Gorbachev credited the Holy Father with bringing about the implosion of the U.S.S.R.

"It's time O'Reilly took a deep breath and stopped with the hyperbole. It's also time he learned a little more about his own religion."

---

### **CONTROVERSY MARKS ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE (AGAIN)**

It would not be St. Patrick's Day without controversy, and this year was no exception. This time the controversy swirled around New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick. The Catholic League, not surprisingly, had a hand in the turmoil.

The problem began when Spitzer was chosen to address the Friendly Sons on the evening of St. Patrick's Day at their annual dinner. Spitzer is not popular with practicing Catholics in New York because of his ill-fated attempt to shut down the crisis pregnancy centers in the state. As soon as members of the Friendly Sons received their invitation to the

dinner—with Spitzer as a featured speaker—they began calling the Catholic League for help.

We immediately issued a news release informing people that Spitzer has never marched in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade. Indeed, in 2000, when asked if he would march in the parade, he told the New York Post, "No." When pressed, he replied, "It's more a scheduling thing than anything else. I'm not going to march in it. I'll just leave it at that."

Well, the Catholic League did not just leave it at that. It was quite obvious that Spitzer had previously refused to march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade because parade officials bar gays from having their own contingent (note: gays have never been barred from marching any more than pro-life Catholics have—it's just that neither group is permitted to have its own unit).

On February 24, we called Spitzer's office to learn whether the Attorney General was planning to march this year. We were told that Spitzer hadn't decided yet and will let us know in a few weeks. It didn't take long before officials of Friendly Sons, under mounting pressure from the rank and file, revoked Spitzer's invitation. That, however, wasn't enough for the Catholic League.

We still wanted to know whether Spitzer was prepared to address a major dinner on St. Patrick's Day yet not march in the very parade that honors the patron saint of the Archdiocese of New York. So on March 13, we called his office for an answer. We were told the event was never on his calendar. "In other words," we told the media, "he had every intention of going to the dinner but not marching in the parade. Which means he's decided to stiff Catholics."

One more item of interest: when we called the Friendly Sons after Spitzer's invitation was pulled and asked why he wasn't speaking, we were told he was never scheduled to speak in the

first place. This is a lie. We have a copy of the invitation.

Despite this unfortunate incident, this year's St. Patrick's Day Parade was as much fun as it always is.

---

### **SOUTH DAKOTA RESOLVES BUSING DISPUTE**

With short notice, parents of Catholic school students in South Dakota were told the state would no longer provide busing for their children. But the controversy came to a quick end when lawmakers found a compromise measure.

It all began when public schools that provide busing to parochial school students were told they can no longer do so and still be covered by insurance. Citing a South Dakota law and an attorney general's opinion from 1992, school authorities said they had no choice but to curtail service to Catholic students.

In 1992, then-Attorney General Mark Barnett said that the South Dakota constitution does not permit funds for any sectarian or religious institution. And the reason it doesn't is due to the bigoted Blaine Amendment provisions that are built into the state's constitution; these amendments, all aimed at prohibiting any funding for Catholic institutions, are based on 19th century anti-Catholic legislation. The state recently moved to enforce this provision, and the sitting Attorney General, Larry Long, backed the decision.

But it appears that there was more at stake than the bigoted Blaine Amendment clause in the South Dakota constitution. They instituted a new formula for public school funding: instead of providing money based on how many public school children lived in the school district, the new formula followed a strict head count of children in the public schools. Because public school enrollment in the rural areas of the state has been declining, the new formula was designed to pressure private school

students into their schools.

Lawmakers, however, quickly came up with a compromise. Busing for parochial school students could be continued as long as the school districts do not spend any extra money as a result. So far, so good, as Catholic school students are being bused to school again.

The Catholic League pledged to join the fight but did not have to do so given the compromise measure. But it just goes to show that until the Blaine Amendments in the states are jettisoned, the residue of anti-Catholic legislation will continue to be a problem.

---

### **ANTI-RELIGIOUS FANATICS**

Despite all the talk about how religious Americans have become since 9-11, anti-religious fanatics abound these days. Here are three fast examples.

It is hardly surprising to learn that the logo for a city in New Mexico by the name Las Cruces, which means “the crosses,” features—you guessed it—multiple crosses. But to the good-humored folks at the local chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, this is an abomination. So they’ve sued. The complaint? The logo means the state is promoting religion. If so, it certainly hasn’t had any effect on Americans United.

The educrats at Varela High School in Florida have no problem with pictures of most student clubs appearing in the school’s yearbook. The Animal Rights Club and the Gay-Straight Alliance Club are perfectly welcome to submit pictures of their members. But not the Choose Life Bible Club. That would be unconstitutional—it might suggest the school is promoting religion. That the school might be promoting sodomy is one thing, but it is quite another to go so far as to promote

religion. There are times when a man, or even a transgendered type, needs to draw a line in the sand. High Noon has arrived.

What makes this case so interesting is the comment made by the principal: he said the term "Choose Life" might offend students who support abortion. He is, of course, correct. But what apparently escaped him was a compromise—the offended students should be free to adopt signs saying, "Choose Death"; then everyone could be happy. In any event, the ever-sensitive principal folded when threatened with a lawsuit.

Then there was the unassuming dentist from Pagosa Springs, Colorado, who got himself a fast lesson on what the First Amendment will not tolerate these days. All he wanted to do was pay for an advertisement on a local National Public Radio (NPR) station saying, "Gently Restoring the Health God Created." When the free speech advocates at NPR heard this, they went nuts. "God." That was it. The word "God." Now, had the dentist decided to use the name of God in vain, he no doubt would have been defended for exercising freedom of expression.

If you think it's hard to write this stuff without being cynical, you're right.

---

## **CANDY CANE CONTROVERSY**

Passing out colored condoms on high school grounds is less controversial than religious-themed candy canes. That's what we've concluded after examining the controversy at Westfield High School in western Massachusetts.

Last December, six students from Westfield distributed 450 pieces of candy to fellow classmates. The candy canes contained notes declaring the J shape stood for Jesus and red and white stripes symbolized Christ's blood and purity. They were immediately threatened with suspension, and on January 2

were told they had to serve a one-day suspension. Their crime? Violating separation of church and state. Their response? A lawsuit.

The candy-cane distributing students got a boost recently when a new regulation issued by the U.S. Department of Education provided a list of students' rights that the authorities must respect. Among those rights is the right to pray in school, etc. Lawyers for the students were heartened by the news. They are invoking it in their brief, which seeks to get the U.S. District Court in Springfield to throw out their suspensions and allow them to distribute religious material on school grounds.

Things are looking up for the students as the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a friend-of-the-court brief on their side. Now had the students only settled for distributing condoms, the anti-religious cops wouldn't have uttered a word. Such is the state of freedom and morality in America today.

---

### **CENSURE GRANTED**

In last month's *Catalyst*, there was a story on the antics of Hightstown, New Jersey councilman Eugene Sarafin. Twice Sarafin had used obscenities to describe his Catholic critics. We called for his censure and on March 3 it was granted.

After writing to all of Sarafin's colleagues urging censure, Council President Nancy Walker-Laudenberger introduced a resolution publicly censuring Sarafin's remarks. The motion passed 5-1; Sarafin was the lone dissenter.

We are pleased that these lawmakers took their responsibilities seriously, and we hope to never hear about Sarafin ever again.



---

## AP SHOWS CLASS

It really rubs us the wrong way whenever we experience anti-Catholic bias of a gratuitous nature. And we see a lot of this kind of needless and care-free expressions of Catholic bashing. A story we recently read is a case in point.

The story revolved around a series of strip joints down south called Sammy's strip clubs. It provided all sorts of detail about the multi-million dollar enterprise, including one piece of information that hardly seemed to fit: the identification of the strip club owner's religion.

"The naked truth is surprising: A chain of Deep South strip joints is run by a one-time Catholic schoolgirl from Alabama." That's the way reporter Leigh Anne Monitor began her story in the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, a prominent Alabama newspaper. This little nugget of info had absolutely nothing to do with the story, yet it was gratuitously cited anyway.

What bothered the Catholic League most of all was the fact that the Associated Press (AP) picked up the story and ran it on the Alabama state wire for use in other newspapers in the state. William Donohue promptly registered a complaint with an AP official, Mike Silverman, asking him to explain why it was necessary for AP to report that the woman went to a Catholic school. Donohue asked, "How is this fact relevant to an article about a strip club?"

We are happy to say that Mr. Silverman acted responsibly by agreeing that the reference to Catholic school was gratuitous. He regretted that AP let this get by and explained that it was actually in violation of AP policy to do this. Donohue then commended Silverman for his response by saying this decision proves that "AP is a class organization."

---

## **KISSLING ON CAMPUS**

A pro-abortion group at Williams College, an elite institution in Massachusetts, has invited Catholics for a Free Choice president Frances Kissling to speak during Holy Week. William Donohue wrote a letter to Williams College President Morton Owen Shapiro expressing his concerns.

Donohue identified Kissling as an anti-Catholic who fraudulently uses the term "Catholic" as a cover for her bigotry. Donohue's request of the president was to denounce Kissling for the bigot she is. We are awaiting a response and may consider other avenues to protest her presence on campus.

---

## **NO REPLY**

There's a club in Washington D.C. called "Between Friends" that likes to host after-hours dance parties for homosexuals. It recently decided to throw a party called "Sunday Mass." An advertisement for the event showed a picture of Christ with the inscription, "Get on your knees, say your prayers, and beg because, boi...God has spoken."

We wrote the proprietor wanting to know whether he has plans to host a Jewish or Muslim service, but he hasn't replied. Somehow we think we'll never hear from this guy. We just hope he got our point.

---

## **WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...**

Call to Action bills itself as a progressive lay Catholic organization. It rejects the Church's teachings on sexuality and other matters, but it nonetheless maintains it is a loyal Catholic group. Though it has the support of some bishops, it

would not be surprising if Cardinal Adam Maida, Archbishop of Detroit, and Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Virginia, are wondering, "with friends like these who needs enemies?"

The Detroit chapter of Call to Action is planning many protests this spring. All the demonstrations will protest the exclusion of women from the priesthood. Among its ventures, there will be a demonstration at the rededication of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral. The blessing of the Church's oils will also be an occasion for a demonstration, as will the ordination of the next class of seminarians. A billboard advocating women's ordination will be posted just a few blocks away from the renovated cathedral, the home church of Cardinal Maida.

Call to Action in Arlington, Virginia, is seeking to bankrupt the diocese. It is urging a boycott of the Arlington Diocese's annual Lenten appeal. It says it is not satisfied with Bishop Loverde's reaction to the sex abuse scandal. Call to Action wants area Catholics to clip a coupon that says "Zero Dollars" and mail it to the diocese's Lenten appeal.

Catholics for a Free Choice is not a Catholic organization and it has twice been condemned by the bishops as a fraud. But this hasn't stopped its leader, Frances Kissling, from selling herself as a Catholic. What is striking about Kissling these days is that she has finally said something nice about Pope John Paul II, though her insincerity is obvious.

Kissling, like most on the left of the political spectrum, is opposed to the war against Iraq. More than that, Kissling and her ilk find it much more difficult to say anything bad about Saddam Hussein than about George W. Bush. That she has taken to praising Pope John Paul II for failing to support the war shows how utterly shameless the woman is.

On CNN's "Crossfire," Kissling said, "I think the Vatican tends to see things in humanitarian ways." How sweet. Maybe

now she'll begin to discover the humanity of unborn babies and start protesting child abuse in the womb.

It was nice to hear Kissling say "the Vatican is a voice for peace." Too bad she doesn't agree with Mother Teresa that nothing destroys peace more than abortion. It was also fun listening to her discover the wisdom of papal authority. In a defense of the pope, she offered, "Religious authority also has legitimate authority." Now if only she meant what she said, we might have cause to celebrate.

The Interfaith Alliance is a rag-tag bunch of religious leaders that have a problem with religion. Their latest target is "In God We Trust." They are incensed that some lawmakers in Colorado want to see our national motto on plaques in every public school in the state. One of those objecting to this initiative is Sister Maureen McCormack of the Sisters of Loretto. "I want to know in whose God we are trusting," she said. One is tempted to say, "Yours," but that would no doubt be rejected as hopelessly chauvinistic. Better to have the god of some indigenous band of tribal warriors—that might win Sister Maureen over.

Another group that makes us wonder is Voice of the Faithful. Those who belong to the group are Catholics upset with the sex abuse scandal; they seek a greater voice for the laity. What made us sit up and take notice recently was the reaction of some of their Long Island members to a miscreant priest. They defended him and blasted those Catholics who exposed him.

It seems that Rev. Charles Papa has visited hundreds of pornographic websites. He has been accused of accessing child pornography, though he disputes this. In any event, when some parishioners found out about his porn hobby, in textbook Voice of the Faithful fashion, they contacted the authorities. And who rushed to his defense? Why the high priests of "zero tolerance," Voice of the Faithful.

As one of its most active members put it, “he [Father Papa] is a human being and a loving, sharing, giving, kind priest. Although porn is not how we want priests to spend their time, let the one without sin throw the first stone.”

To understand the behavior of Voice of the Faithful, it is important to know that Rev. Papa supported church members for founding a local chapter of the group last summer. He has also been criticized by parishioners for his dissidence and rejection of certain Church practices. Had he been orthodox, his defenders might have taken a different tact. So much for Voice of the Faithful’s commitment to principles.

One more example of this group’s affinity for politics was demonstrated in March when the Greater Philadelphia chapter admitted lobbying the papal nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, on the right of the laity to help select the next bishop of Philadelphia (Cardinal Bevilacqua will soon be retiring). It would be neater, and surely a lot quicker, if Voice simply detailed those areas of ecclesiastical life it isn’t interested in controlling.

So if these are some of our friends these days, we don’t look forward to meeting our enemies.

---

## **JUST DESERTS**

It’s not the first time we’ve read about trouble coming to those who have previously offended us, but this time it’s big news: both Disney/Miramax and WNEW are experiencing their share of difficulties these days. We say it’s just deserts.

Miramax, a Disney subsidiary, has produced several anti-Catholic movies over the years— so much so that we’ve pressed Disney chief Michael Eisner to dump Miramax head Harvey Weinstein. Now it seems it’s Weinstein who wants to dump Eisner.

Miramax is in its glory these days as one movie after another has done extremely well at the box office. Weinstein's operation is said to be worth \$3 billion. On the other hand, Disney has been going through some rough times for years. Weinstein has brought in 40 of Disney's 44 Oscar nominations this year and he wants out. He says Eisner is gypping him out of his fair share of the profits. An attempt by Weinstein to buy out Disney's Miramax share was rejected by Eisner.

WNEW is the New York radio station that made national news when it broadcast a live sex romp from St. Patrick's Cathedral last summer. The Catholic League led a major protest and the result was that the show's hosts, Opie and Anthony, were fired. This, however, was only the beginning: the station has been floundering ever since.

The station was once known as the nation's number-one carrier of rock music. According to an article in posted on CNN.com, "The venerable station has gone from free-form to free fall, barely registering an Arbitron rating and dumping its most recent format—talk—last month." In short, with Opie and Anthony off the air, WNEW hasn't figured out a way to keep what's left of its audience.

Disney/Miramax and WNEW both tangled with the Catholic League and lost. Maybe that's because we're getting a little help from a source unknown to these guys.

---

### **PHIL DONAHUE AND ROSIE O'DONNELL ON DISPLAY**

The February 24 edition of "Donahue" (MSNBC) featured an interview of Rosie O'Donnell by host Phil Donahue. The segment ended with an extended conversation on Catholicism.

In discussing the sex abuse scandal in the Church, O'Donnell said: "And you know what? It needs to be out in the forefront. I really hope that the Catholic Church gets sued until the end of time. Maybe, you know, we can melt down some of the gold

toilets in the pope's Vatican and pay off some of the lawsuits because, you know, frankly, the whole tenet of Christianity, of being pious, of living a Christ-like life, has been lost in Catholicism, I believe."

William Donohue couldn't resist offering his own analysis to the media. Here it is:

"Well, you know, there is something about two aging and embittered Irish Catholics that is so, well, you know, embarrassing.

"We learned a lot from Rosie last night and none of it was endearing. Here is a grown woman crediting Oprah Winfrey with 'teaching America how to have feelings and how to grieve.' Prior to Oprah we just sulked. Now we all bleed. Then there was the exchange she had with Phil laughing heartily about those times of yesteryear when their parents scrubbed the house before the Monsignor popped by for a visit. Now their houses are a filthy mess as not even a deacon will drop by.

"To hear Rosie proclaim that the Church should not be exempt 'from the laws of nature and God' was quite a treat, especially given that her ideas on the subject strike some as being intrinsically disordered these days. Equally perverse is her comment on the gold toilets in the Vatican: she must be thinking about where she last sat when visiting her grieving friends in Hollywood."

"Well, you know, it's a shame that this close to St. Patrick's Day two deracinated Irish Catholics should find the need to vent on national television. Talk about reality TV—these two are not to be believed."

As it turned out, this was the very last show Phil Donahue did. MSNBC cancelled the show due to poor ratings.

---

## LETTERS

*Vanity Fair*

April 2003

### **The Great Debate, Continued: Christopher Hitchens, Catholic League hero?...**

Rarely is there an article on abortion worth reading anymore. That's because both sides are so utterly predictable that it's a waste of time. Christopher Hitchens's contribution, however, is the exception to the rule ["Fetal Distraction," February]. As one who has sparred with him before, I commend Hitchens for his courage and honesty in dealing with this most divisive of issues.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights  
New York, New York

---

*Newsday*

February 21, 2003

### **Murphy's Not to Blame**

There is not a single Catholic I know who is not angry, hurt and dismayed by the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. There is never an excuse for molesting minors and it is even worse when those in positions of authority turn a blind eye to it. But it is also true that nothing justifies unfair accusations.

Closer to home, the reaction against Bishop William Murphy of the Rockville Centre Diocese has been incredibly unfair. The problem on Long Island must be put squarely on the doorstep of



Bishop John McGann. Murphy is to blame for none of the problem: 100 percent of it goes to McGann. And that is why it is so obscene to hear people calling for Murphy to resign. He may still have to defend his record in Boston, but on Long Island the verdict is in: He's innocent.

Not only is Murphy innocent, he moved with dispatch to get rid of problem priests. Let me be specific. We all know now that the Rev. Brian McKeon was a serial molester. Under McGann, he was promoted to pastor of St. Anne's in Garden City. Under Murphy, he was bounced: Murphy took over in September 2001 and, in November, McKeon was gone.

No doubt McGann had his reasons for keeping such priests and it is not my intention to impugn his motives. It is my intention to say that whatever good reasons he had, he, like some other bishops, exercised flawed judgment in this regard.

To blame Murphy for any of this is irresponsible. If anything, he put in place a team of professionals led by an exemplary priest, Father Bob Batule, to deal squarely with this issue.

Finally, it is not the bishops of New York who are holding up a mandatory reporting law in New York State—it is Family Planning Advocates (the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood) and the New York Civil Liberties Union. They are opposed to blanketing everyone because they are interested in shielding abortion providers from reporting cases of statutory rape. Would that Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota would get on board with the bishops in insisting that there be no exemptions; instead, he wants the law to apply only to the clergy.

There are lots of reasons to be angry but no amount of it justifies trashing the innocent. The evidence shows that almost all priests have had absolutely nothing to do with the scandal; it also shows that Murphy's role on Long Island has been to tackle what he inherited.

In short, before anyone further hyperventilates over the “crisis,” let’s not forget that most of our priests are good men and that Long Island’s bishop is doing what he can to move forward.

William A. Donohue

*Editor’s note: The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Manhattan*

---

*The American Conservative*

March 10, 2003

### **Drawing Distinctions**

Jeremy Lott (Feb. 10) claims that the Catholic League uses the same tactics as CAIR. That may be true in some instances but the examples he cited are poor. The Catholic League does not issue “frequent alerts to elicit comments and money from supporters.” Six times a year we ask our members for a donation to pay for a specific project.

Do we “demonize” our opponents? We fight back against those who bash the Church, but it is not easy to see how this amounts to “demonizing.” Regarding the charge of our “slipshod use of polling,” we don’t poll. Finally, do we “elevate small tiffs into a national outrage”? That’s quite subjective: when we got “Opie and Anthony” fired for broadcasting a description of a couple having sex in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, we weren’t elevating anything—we were simply responding to an outrageous condition.

In short, it is tricky business to lump all anti-defamation organizations together.

William Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

New York, NY

---

*Reason*

March 2003

## **E Pluribus Umbrage**

Tim Cavanaugh, author of "E Pluribus Umbrage" (December), finds it amusing that in the midst of the church's priest scandal, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights "alerted its 300,000 members to a grave threat to the faith: a King of the Hill episode in which cartoon housewife Peggy impersonates a nun."

This makes it sound as if we object to Sister Act portrayals, but anyone who has really followed the Catholic League knows this is bunk. Our objection to this episode was the vile way in which the Eucharist was treated. Cavanaugh omits this because it would interfere with the point he wants to make.

On a more important note, Cavanaugh says that our petition to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) protesting Opie and Anthony shows we really do believe in censorship. This is nonsense. Congress long ago established the FCC, and no one has ever ruled it to be a censorial body. Indeed, when we succeeded in getting the show kicked off the air, we immediately requested the FCC not to go through with yanking the license of the station.

Perhaps the most telling comment by Cavanaugh is his remark that "the most endearing thing about Bill Donohue is that he genuinely seems to enjoy hurting people." It would be more accurate to say I enjoy giving it to intellectual jackasses. Cavanaugh will escape my wrath because he is no intellectual.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and

## Civil Rights

---

*America*

March 3, 2003

### **Accurate**

The Rev. Andrew M. Greeley's conclusion that *The New York Times's* coverage of the sexual abuse scandal in the church constitutes "virulent anti-Catholicism" is irresponsible ("The *Times* and Sexual Abuse by Priests" 2/10). The *Times*, like most major newspapers that covered the scandal, never implied that most priests were predators. And this is especially true of Laurie Goodstein, whom Father Greeley attacks. Never have I found her to be anything but professional and accurate in her reporting.

It does no good to blame the messenger for bringing bad news.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

New York, N.Y.