

THE ROAD MOST TRAVELED: FROM BOB JONES UNIVERSITY TO THE PLAYBOY MANSION

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In February we objected to George W. Bush's visit to Bob Jones University. Six months later we objected to Al Gore's refusal to stop a fund-raising event at the Playboy Mansion. Subsequently, Bush made a public statement of regret regarding his handling of the Bob Jones matter and Gore saw to it that the Playboy event was canceled. We are obviously pleased with both outcomes, but there are some lingering concerns.

To be a Protestant is to be part of a community of believers who are defined by what they are not. They are not Roman Catholics. But they are Christians. So they protest. And what they protest is Roman Catholicism.

Not infrequently does this defensive posture show an ugly side to it. When it does, it triggers a response from the Catholic League. We are not here to engage in intramural theological disputes with our Christian brothers, but neither are we here to be their theological punching bag.

Catholics, for the most part, really don't care what Protestants believe. But the contra is not true: there is no end to the books, magazines, pamphlets, tapes and videos that Protestant publishing houses distribute attacking Catholicism. While most of these writers are just plain kooky, there are some (e.g. professors in divinity schools) who present a more polished face. Both groups deserve a response from Catholic quarters.

But how serious is this threat? Not very. Those who demonize the Catholic Church for its beliefs tend to affect

subcultures within the dominant culture. As such, they find it difficult to break into the mainstream, creating, in effect, a self-contained ghetto. It goes without saying that the number one reason why this isn't a serious threat is due to its origins—it is rooted in theology. And on this score, we have a decided advantage.

The road most traveled for the Catholic League is not the one paved with theological challenges, but with cultural ones. And that is why the Playboy Mansion venue is more disconcerting than Bob Jones University. The house that Hefner built symbolizes the dehumanization of men and women; that this quality has been successfully mainstreamed into our culture can be doubted by no one. Hefner's house also symbolizes a philosophy which is deeply subversive of our Judeo-Christian ethos.

It is no secret that a significant portion of our cultural elite thinks the Catholic Church is a repressive institution.

It is also no secret that the Catholic League spends most of its time fighting the captains of our culture.

Count among this gang Hugh Hefner. It was his Playboy Philosophy, with its premium on self-gratification, that played a major role restructuring the cultural landscape of the 1960s. And we have yet to rid our cultural soil of this poison.

Just as sexual license is the defining element of the Playboy Philosophy, sexual restraint is the defining element of Catholic sexual ethics. Not content to let these differences co-exist, Hugh Hefner and associates have long attacked the Catholic Church for its teachings. The usual way it is done is through the advancement of invidious stereotypes about sexually repressed Catholic male and female. Sometimes the stereotypes are found in essays on the history of sexual taboos in America. More recently, Hefner observed that the pop star Madonna was fighting the environment of her roots:

she was in rebellion against her "Catholic home."

Recently, Hefner bragged how he was seeing two "nice, Catholic" twins. Had they been Jews, he would have kept his mouth shut. But his point was

that he was working to rid them of their "conservative" upbringing. How thoughtful. He did not say whether his liberating exercise required him to reach for yet another dose of Viagra.

When Loretta Sanchez was finally forced to cancel the "Gorgy," Playboy executives went on the warpath. Richard Rosenzweig, executive vice president of Playboy Enterprises, defended the Hefner empire by saying that it was as "American as apple pie." Sadly, this is true, but what he had to say about the Democratic party and Playboy was damning: "I would never have expected this from a party that we have supported financially and editorially through the pages of the magazine for many years."

No one from Bob Jones University would ever claim to have the influence on the Republican party that Playboy executives boast to have on the Democratic party. Gore is no more anti-Catholic than Bush, but unlike Bush, the vice president carries the baggage of the Clinton-Gore-Hollywood years.

Someone needs to throw Gore some rope so he can pull himself out of this Hollywood swamp. If he doesn't get out soon, he may sink.