

# UNDERSTANDING ANTHONY MALKIN

In New York, like all big cities, there are public notables, superstar athletes, entertainers, politicians, community leaders, businessmen, venture capitalists, clergymen, artists, media personalities, actors, musicians—celebrities of all kinds—persons who stand out and are well known. Not among them is Anthony Malkin. That, however, is changing.

I can see the Empire State Building outside our office windows. We are on the 34th floor of a 46-floor tower just off the corner of 34th and 7th; the building that Kong built is on 34th and 5th. It has always been my favorite building in New York City: bold and majestic, it symbolizes what New York is all about. That all changed in May.

When I made application to honor Mother Teresa with blue and white gushing from the Empire State Building on August 26, I thought it would be a slam dunk. Who would deny a tribute to a person the whole world loves? When denied on May 5 (for the first time), without explanation, I was dumbfounded. I soon learned that someone named Anthony Malkin owned the building. My letter to him was never answered.

Then we learned a few things about Mr. Malkin. His father made himself a small fortune and now Number One Son is in charge. Anthony went to Choate Rosemary Hall, a tony prep school whom no one has ever confused with P.S. 109. He went to Harvard and later met his future bride, a Princeton graduate; she attended the equally tony Dalton School in New York City. It did not hurt Anthony that his wife's father was a director of Enron and the former president of the Belco Petroleum Corporation.

The Malkin Foundation likes to give money to pro-abortion and pro-euthanasia causes, as well as to radical separation of church and state organizations. What it doesn't like are organizations liked by Mother Teresa.

There's more. The Empire State Building denied a lighting tribute to the U.S. Marines in 2008, yet it honored the genocidal maniacs who worked under Mao Zedong in 2009. Now it is slamming the door on Mother Teresa. There is a certain profile emerging, and it is not a pretty sight.

By contrast, we at the Catholic League are more of a lunch-bucket gang, the kind of guys and gals who like dirty-water hot dogs off the streets of New York, drink beer and go to Mass. And none of us went to Choate or Dalton. Amazingly, we never felt deprived or even oppressed. But we don't take kindly to those who spit in our face, and we are especially peeved when the ones doing it were born with a silver spoon in their mouths.

We also don't like it when the fat cats try to pressure us. In June, we received a fax from a wealthy law firm on Park Avenue informing us of what they regarded as "threatening" e-mails. The letters, none of which were threatening—they were merely jaggging in nature—were a few sentences long, chiding them for acting like jerks (they were written by me to the PR person representing the Empire State Building, an employee of the communications giant, Edelman). Yet in the mind of the senior attorney, "The messages are clearly designed to threaten."

No sooner had the fax arrived when I replied with a letter of my own.

Here is what I faxed: "Your attempt to intimidate us has failed. Please make a note of it."

I have been writing and teaching about the First Amendment for the better part of my career, and I don't need some Park Avenue hot shot trying to nail me with his thinly veiled threats. This is not the first time I have had to deal with bully lawyers: I never fail to call their bluff (see *Secular Sabotage* for examples). They pull these tricks because most people who field such missives are intimidated when they see a

letter from a prominent law firm issuing them a warning. But it doesn't work with me. Indeed, if I really felt threatened by someone, I wouldn't write a letter. I'd call 911.

It's all so bizarre. While Malkin is having his reputation trashed and is spending money hand over foot on PR reps and lawyers, the Catholic League is surging in acclaim and membership. All because a rich boy with a militant secularist agenda enjoys saying no to Mother Teresa.

Word has it that Malkin has hated me for years. Fine. Lots of people hate me. It happens in this business. As I've said before, being president of the Catholic League is not a popularity contest—I am being paid to tell the truth and confront those who offend Catholics and/or the Catholic Church. I am not here to be everyone's buddy. Leadership means drawing a line in the sand, and that is exactly what we do here at the Catholic League.

If Malkin were prudent, he would go on hating me without stiffing Mother Teresa. That was his fatal mistake. The reason why we will turn thousands into the streets of New York on the evening of August 26 is not because of me: it is because of Mother Teresa. Unfortunately, Anthony Malkin can't distinguish between hating me and dissing the world's most beloved humanitarian. But that is what hate does—it skews our thinking and blinds us to reality.