

# VICTORY OVER SONY

**Editor's Note:** *This victory over Sony is emblematic of two important characteristics of the Catholic League: a) it shows what can be done "behind the scenes" and b) it is a tribute to our members. While much of what the league does is high profile in nature (our protest against "Nothing Sacred" is an example), we sometimes choose not to go public with our objections. In this case, we chose to pressure Sony without initially contacting the press. It is important to recognize that the threat of retaliation that the league made against Sony was only credible because of our members. If we did not feel that you would financially support our ad in the **New York Times**, we would never have made this threat. In short, the reason we won is due to you—the Catholic League has the greatest members in the world.*

Sony releases a pro-abortion "Christmas" CD, scoffs at its Christian critics, and then does a 180 by permanently withdrawing the album. What caused the sea change? Sony met the Catholic League.

It was in October 1996 that Columbia Records, which is owned by Sony, released the CD, *O Come All Ye Faithful*. What made this album so outrageous was its intent: the holiday album was explicitly designed to fund the pro-abortion message of the performers, Rock for Choice. Rock for Choice is a creation of the Feminist Majority, a militant pro-abortion group headed by former NOW director, Eleanor Smeal.

When the league learned of this travesty last winter, it registered its objections in a letter to Sony President Thomas Mottola. We got nowhere, as did several distinguished Catholic and Protestant leaders. We then wrote to Sony Chairman and CEO Norio Ohga in Japan. Again, we got nowhere (Ohga refused to answer anyone who wrote to him). Then we got tough. And that's why we won. Here's what happened.

On January 16, 1997 William Donohue wrote to Thomas Mottola stating that he found it highly objectionable "to abuse the traditions of a world religion" by making a pro-abortion

statement. Arguing that the heritage of Catholicism was being “exploited for political purposes,” Donohue maintained that even those who do not see abortion as representing “the certain death of innocent human beings” should at least restrain themselves “from appropriating the season of Christmas to register a pro-abortion stance.”

Donohue asked Mottola to retire the CD, pledging that if it’s available next year, “you won’t hear the end of it.”

The response was insulting. Writing for Mottola was Patricia Kiel, Senior Vice President for Communications (her form letter was sent to everyone who wrote to Mottola). She assured the league that “there was no intent on Sony Music or Rock for Choice’s part to mock or attack Christianity or Christmas,” adding that she regretted that the album “caused you such concern and discomfort.”

The league’s next move was to contact Norio Ohga. On January 31, Donohue told him that *O Come All Ye Faithful* was “not the kind of reverential tribute that Christians (and others) would expect, rather it was nothing more than a blasphemous promotional device used to further the agenda of pro-abortion forces.” Donohue also took strong exception to the statement on the CD that proclaimed legal abortion as “the most spiritual of gifts.” He branded this action as “inflammatory, reckless and bigoted.”

Donohue then took aim at Kiel’s letter calling it “blatantly dishonest.” He promised a boycott if the CD wasn’t retired once and for all. This time Sony’s response was to simply ignore everyone by refusing to reply. Knowing that it was too early to devise a new strategy to kill the CD for the 1997 Christmas season, a decision was made to wait until June before trying a new tactic.

On June 13, Donohue wrote to Mottola expressing his exasperation with Sony. He cited the letter by Patricia Kiel

wherein she regretted that the CD “caused you such concern and discomfort.” He then wrote that “I now regret to inform you that what I have planned may cause you much more than concern and discomfort.”

Before outlining his plan, Donohue repeated his objection: “It is not the existence of artists called Rock for Choice that is the central problem. It is not the fact that they are funded by the pro-abortion organization, Feminist Majority, that is the central problem. The central problem is that these people are abusing Christmas to hawk their pro-abortion message.” He then asked one more time that the CD be retired, only this time a specific pledge was made in the event Sony refused. The rest of the letter is reprinted here in full:

“In the event you refuse to cooperate, I have decided on the following course of action. The week before Thanksgiving, just as the Christmas shopping spree begins, the Catholic League will publish on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* a statement asking the public to boycott all Sony products; I will raise the funds needed to publish the ad—approximately \$22,000—in the league’s October appeal to its 350,000 members.

“In addition, I will seek the cooperation of dozens of Christian, Jewish and Muslim organizations that are likely to join with us in this protest (the boycott will be based on gross insensitivity to religious convictions, and not on abortion, per se); obviously, I will also tap the support of the many pro-life organizations that dot the country. Indeed, I will ask all these groups to join me in a press conference denouncing Sony for its irresponsibility.

“If you decide to retire the album, there will be no boycott, no statement in the *New York Times*, no organized effort against Sony, no press conference. Please let me know your decision by August 31. If there is no reply, or if your decision is to continue to market *O Come All Ye Faithful*, then the strategy I have outlined will be triggered.

“When we called for a boycott of Calvin Klein, the company had the good sense to withdraw an objectionable ad. When we called for a boycott of Target Stores, it had the good sense to redress our grievance. And when we called for a boycott against HBO, it had the good sense to retire a program that was incredibly offensive to Catholics. It is my hope that you will also act responsibly and do what is right to protect Sony’s good name.”

That did it. Mottola wrote back on July 7: “Since the release of this album last October, the sales cycle of this album as run its course. We have no plans of re-releasing this album or another similar album this Christmas.” To which Donohue said in a news release, “Let him say what he wants—we are only too glad he got the message.”