

WASHINGTON TIMES DOES A 180

A fight has been avoided, thanks to Michael Mahr, advertising director at the *Washington Times*. Here's the scoop.

The Eternal Gospel church of Layman Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) recently surfaced once again with another one of their insipid, anti-Catholic statements, this time in the pages of the *Washington Times*; a similar ad appeared on June 27, 1997.

Both the 1997 and the 1998 ads take the Catholic Church to task for not recognizing Saturday as the Sabbath. The ads are particularly hard on the pope and are laced with passages from Scripture designed to impute evil to the Church. Some of these silly charges have long been made—the Church as “WHORE” and “BEAST”—but some are new: the SDA ads actually charge that the pope is responsible for breaking down the walls that separate church and state.

Though the league finds the ads troubling, it finds it worse than disturbing that an established newspaper like the *Washington Times* would provide space for this bigotry. After all, the newspaper is not some rag found in artsy communities and college bookstores.

When William Donohue complained to *Washington Times* editor-in-chief Wesley Pruden in 1997 about an SDA ad, Pruden said that he was not responsible for the advertising section. He did say, however, that the ad was insulting. Furthermore, he said that he had brought this matter up with the appropriate persons in the advertising department, concluding that “I don't think this will happen again.” Well, it did.

This time Donohue sent a letter to the newspaper's advertising director, Michael Mahr. He cut to the quick: “The time for equivocation is over. Before I decide what to do, I need to know whether the *Washington Times* is finally willing to make a firm commitment never to run such an ad again.”

Meanwhile, James Cardinal Hickey, archbishop of Washington, wrote about this matter in the archdiocesan newspaper, *Catholic Standard*. He quite rightfully branded the ad as “an attack on the Pope” and as a throwback to the bad old days when it was perfectly fine to hurl bigoted invective against the Roman Catholic Church and especially the Holy Father.”

In a letter dated September 16, just two days after Donohue’s letter was sent, Mahr responded by saying that he personally reviews all controversial ads. He then dismissed Donohue’s concerns by saying, “I appreciate your sensitivity to the ad and regret it has offended you.”

In a news release of September 21, Donohue said that “we will conduct a publicity campaign against the newspaper that it will surely regret. We’ll see who gets the last laugh.”

On September 23, Michael Mahr called Donohue to say that the Washington Times would never run these ads again. He said that he was flooded with letters and e-mails, many of which came from priests, registering outrage at the ad. We are very pleased with Mr. Mahr’s decision and consider the matter settled once and for all.