



Catholic Civil Rights League

www.ccrl.ca

Monthly highlights Volume 1, No. 11, November 30, 2010

Media bungling of papal comments on AIDS

TORONTO, November 24, 2010 – As with most news involving papal comments, some reflections by Pope Benedict touching on the AIDS crisis and condom use have provoked the usual rush of anti-Catholic invective to the message boards and talk radio. However, most of the media coverage has been, if not fully accurate, at least fair, apart from a few perhaps hastily-composed headlines (‘Vatican says everyone can use condoms’, to quote AP’s contribution Nov. 23).

Upon closer reading, the passages in question do not represent a departure from traditional Catholic teaching on sexuality or contraception. They were made not in the setting of an official statement, but in passages from a book of interviews composed in a conversational style. Unfortunately, the media representatives who really “got it wrong” are those employed by the Vatican newspaper, L’Osservatore Romano, who selected and chose to print the excerpts prior to the book’s release. It would not take advanced studies in media relations to know which passages the international press would be likeliest to notice. It is true that the statements would have been attacked no matter how they were issued, but a modicum of timing and planning would likely have allowed more opportunity for explanation of what the statements meant.

The principle of double effect, or lesser evil, is a long-standing part of Catholic theology. To the extent that Pope Benedict’s conversation with a writer recognized that there is a situation where the use of a condom might represent the beginning of a journey toward moral sense, that would likely be part of the double effect principle.

The League does not employ moral theologians, but we do know media balance and professionalism, and – again, apart from those wide-open mikes and message boards – this story was generally covered as well as could be expected. In keeping with the League’s mandate, we have asked some of the message boards to follow their own policies and remove defamatory and hateful comments,

and we have provided our members with the best analysis we could find of the issue. Some of the best analytical articles are available through links on our website. The book itself, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times*, by Peter Seewald, was released Nov. 23.

CBC message boards challenged

As noted in the article above, the anonymous message boards offered by almost all major media tend to attract strongly anti-Catholic commentary whenever the Church is in the news. Given the anonymous nature of the invective, the “alert moderator” feature is usually the only way of combating the worst excesses, though in some cases a separate phone or e-mail message to the moderator may be worthwhile.

Very generally, some boards are more sensitive than others to the issue of fairness in religious content. We have an ongoing inquiry with CBC.ca about some extreme content that was left online after numerous church-related stories. One of our members has filed a human rights complaint, citing religious discrimination, about the boards.

Let the League know: Articles, cartoons and advertising that you believe have anti-Catholic content should be sent to ccrl@ccrl.ca to help us respond in a timely way. You can reach us by phone at 416-466-8244.

Bill C-510 to be debated Dec. 15

The second hour of debate and parliamentary vote on Bill C-510, the private members’ bill seeking to criminalize abortion coercion, is now scheduled for December 15th, having received its first hour of debate Nov. 1. League members are encouraged to support this bill with their MPs.

League News

In January, League President Phil Horgan will be part of a debate at Hart House, University of Toronto, about the recent court decision lifting Canada's last provisions against prostitution. (The decision is currently stayed pending appeal.) Once confirmed, the date will be shared with our Toronto and area membership. On January 20, Executive Director Joanne McGarry will speak at King's College, University of Western Ontario, about the role the media played in the liberalization of abortion. The event is sponsored by King's Live for Life.

We're happy to provide a guest speaker for parish and school events in any centre where have a director available. Contact Joanne at 416-466-8244 or cctl@cctl.ca for more information.

Development appeal going strong

We hoped to raise about \$25,000 over and above normal membership renewals in our annual Fall development appeal, and have just \$7,000 to go in order to meet the goal. If you have already given, thank you.

Your generous response to our Fall development appeal is greatly appreciated, and will help us continue our work on the issues discussed above. We also hope to continue our participation in the prostitution court case, and the Quebec parents' challenge to the province's new Ethics and Religious Culture Course. League subscriptions can be requested as Christmas presents for family and friends for a donation of any amount. Send names and e-mail addresses to us at the address below.

Mark your calendars

The League's annual dinner will take place Thursday, June 2 in Toronto. The evening will include the presentation of the [Archbishop Exner Award](#) for Catholic Excellence in Public Life. We welcome written nominations for the award. Guest speaker at the dinner will be Dr. Donald De Marco, professor of philosophy at St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, Ont. and author of several books, including [The Heart of Virtue](#) and (with Benjamin Wiker) [Architects of the Culture of Death](#).

Chapter contacts

For upcoming meetings of our *Windsor-Essex chapter* contact Bob Baksi at robert@baksi.com. *Antigonish chapter* meets the first Tuesday of each month and is active in media and public school issues. At its September meeting, Greg MacDougall was elected chapter president. He can be reached at: danielgregmacdougall@hotmail.com.

A League member from St. Catharines, Ont. is interested in forming a chapter in that region. If you live in the St. Catharines diocese and are interested, please [contact us](#) and we will include your name on the initial interest list. To inquire about forming a chapter in your area, contact Joanne at 416-466-8244 or cctl@cctl.ca.

E-mail newsletter update

It's almost a year since we changed our communications program to provide one monthly electronic newsletter, a single sheet monthly insert for renewal notices and literature displays, and a quarterly hard copy bulletin for those who prefer postal mail. By now we hope all our supporters are receiving their newsletter by the route they prefer.

If you would like to sign up for the monthly electronic letter, simply send your name and e-mail address to cctl@cctl.ca. If your friends and associates say they have not been receiving any newsletters from us, it's most likely because we do not have their current e-mail address or because they have not let us know their preference. Send their information to us and we'll be happy to update our records.

If you're an e-mail subscriber and aren't hearing from us at least once a month, the problem may be your spam filter. Give us a call and we'll suggest some solutions.

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