

Catholics invoke hate law

By Larry Witham
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Roman Catholics fed up with seeing their religious leaders ridiculed by militant homosexual groups have decided to use a weapon from their detractors' arsenal.

After the disruption of New York Cardinal John O'Connor's recent talk in Boston, a Catholic group filed a complaint under the state's new hate-crime law — a law that gay rights groups lobbied for.

"Clearly the attack on Cardinal O'Connor was due to his religious beliefs," said C.J. Doyle, director of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights in Massachusetts. "That's a hate crime under Massachusetts law."

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Outside the Catholic pro-life conference, 55 demonstrators carried placards that associated Cardinal O'Connor with deviant sexual behavior. Inside, demonstrators chanted "shame, shame" to disrupt speeches.

The Boston demonstration and another protest Tuesday at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington are the latest incidents in what Catholics call a growing attack on the church by homosexual groups including ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nation.

The action in Boston is the first effort by Catholics to use such a hate-crime statute, which many other states also have enacted.

The 1990 law adds "harassment or intimidation" for reasons of race, religion or sexual orientation to the criminal statutes. When no "bodily

harm" is involved, the misdemeanor carries penalties of up to a year in prison or a \$1,000 fine.

"It is hypocritical and unacceptable for homosexual militants to demand tolerance and preach hate ... against religious leaders," Mr. Doyle said.

In a related development, the organizers of the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York are having their own battle with gay activists.

Parade organizers said Tuesday that homosexual groups will not be allowed to march this year because of their "outrageous behavior" last year.

At St. Patrick's Cathedral on the parade route, homosexual marchers used the parade "as a vehicle to publicly insult" the church by chanting, the organizers said.

Some militant homosexuals say they are not anti-religious.

"We're not trying to knock religion or Catholicism," said Brian Ramey, a Queer Nation member in

Washington.

During Queer Nation's demonstration at the shrine in Washington, a woman mocked the crucifixion by hanging on a cross — signifying their belief that the church oppresses homosexual and pro-choice women.

"We're using the [crucifixion] symbol to get attention," Mr. Ramey said. "Cardinal O'Connor is a foe of queers. If people get offended, tough."

Since a dramatic protest inside New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral in December 1989, church services have been disrupted in California and Massachusetts.

At the protest in St. Patrick's Cathedral, homosexual militants desecrated the Mass, sprawled on the floor and shouted protests.

In November, two ACT-UP members stormed a news conference of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington and hurled condoms at Cincinnati Archbishop

Daniel Pilarczyk.

"Definitely, the Catholic Church is their biggest target," said the Rev. Gregory Coiro, spokesman at the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, which has dealt with several homosexual protests.

The confrontations are creating "an atmosphere of hate that could lead to violence," said John Puthenveetil, president of the Catholic League. "I'm concerned about the increasingly strident nature of the activities."

Several Catholics who were interviewed said that while demonstrating is a constitutional right, desecrating worship and vilifying a religion is not.

"Whenever somebody comes into our church [to disrupt], they are violating our constitutional right to worship," said George W. Koch, a Wisconsin lawyer with the Catholic League. "The holy sacrament of the Mass is very sacred to us."