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The Cross, the witch, and The New York Times

by Phyllis Zagano

Just Catholic

The Celtic cross on the beer bottle caught my eye. The full label depicted a witch burning.

No one is complaining about the cross, only about the witch.

The witch-burning label caught the eye of Vicki Noble, co-author of the *“Motherpeace Tarot Deck”* and publisher of the journal *Snakepower*. Well known among Wiccans as an expert in goddess spirituality, astrology and shamanic healing, Noble began an e-campaign challenging the label.

According to *The New York Times*, Noble wrote: *“Can we stop this brewer from their hate imagery?”* and *“Can you imagine them showing a black person being lynched or a Jewish person going to the oven?”* and *“Such images are simply not tolerated in our society anymore (thank the Goddess) and this one should not be, either.”*

The brewery says they’ll take up the matter in November. It appears they’ll change the label. Score one for the witches. They are, after all, defending women.

But, has anyone taken a close look at the Lost Abbey brewery cross? It is a stylized Celtic cross, each staff emblazoned with one of the four elements of beer making -- barley, water, yeast and hops.

Lost Abbey is a California micro-brewery run by Tomme Arthur, who calls himself a *“recovering Catholic.”* Everything about Lost Abbey’s marketing spells *“monastery”* -- without the monks. Lost Abbey brands include *“Judgment Day”*, *“Gift of the Magi”*, *“The Ten Commandments”* and *“Carnevale”*, each with a different label topped by the stylized Celtic cross. Arthur and three others sell (and ship) Lost Abbey beer wherever they can.

Now, I have nothing against beer or micro-brewers or inventive marketing schemes. I think religious symbols are what they are. Sometimes they are appropriated by folks who simply don't understand what they mean to believers.

So I don't mind so much the cutesy beer names and tongue-in-cheek style of this beer business, but their use of the cross (if you'll pardon the expression) burns me. If no one else will say it, I will: who in his right mind would put barley, water, yeast and hops on the staves of a Christian cross and use it as a brewery icon? It's dumb, offensive, and infuriating. Lost Abbey's crassness is well beyond the pale.

That point, of course, was lost on *The New York Times*, so involved as it was with witches' rights. The *Times* joins the chorus when any interest group is offended -- except Christians. Why?

Aside from habitually ignoring snideness toward Christians, the "newspaper of record" is far and away the leader in the Get-the-Church Derby. While it has reported interesting and important parts of the ongoing pederasty saga, it is clearly no friend of Catholicism's adherents or beliefs.

For example, in case you missed it, the *Times*' Pulitzer Prize-winning art critic approvingly reviewed a Greenwich Village art show about activism and AIDS. The *Times*' accompanying illustration centered on two pieces: a photo of Ronald Regan and a depiction of Cardinal O'Connor and a condom, with "Know Your Scumbags" in large red letters. The *Times* called it "art." New York's Archbishop Timothy Dolan complained, but that's not news. It's only news when the witches complain.

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As far as the Lost Abbey's cross is concerned, no one seems to mind or even care, except Moylan's Brewery. Moylan's, a northern California micro-brewer, installed Celtic cross pull taps on its restaurant kegs, much to the annoyance of Lost Abbey's owners -- and attorneys. So Lost Abbey argued Trademark infringement, claiming it owned the Celtic cross. Moylan's caved. Lost Abbey won.

You cannot make this stuff up.

I'm no lawyer, and I suppose Trademarks are Trademarks, but how can a Celtic cross become a California brewer's Trademark? Will they be making a Trademark of their own next?

The moral of the story? No one seems to care what anybody does with Christian icons. But, beware all you Celtic cross owners. You may be next to lose a Trademark case! Unless, of course, you have a few witches on your side. You know for sure *The New York Times* will be no help.

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