

Hagee expresses âdeep regretâ to Catholics

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Texas megachurch pastor John Hagee, who endorsed presidential candidate Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and drew sharp criticism for anti-Catholic comments, has written a letter expressing “deep regret” for causing any harm.

Hagee, who leads Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, was harshly criticized by Bill Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and by Democratic National Committee officials.

“Out of a desire to advance greater unity among Catholics and evangelicals in promoting the common good, I want to express my deep regret for any comments that Catholics have found hurtful,” Hagee wrote to Donohue.

Hagee, who also is the founder of Christians United for Israel, said he gained an “improved understanding” of Catholics after recent “constructive dialogue” with Catholic leaders.

“In my zeal to oppose anti-Semitism and bigotry in all its ugly forms, I have often emphasized the darkest chapters in the history of Catholic and Protestant relations with the Jews,” he wrote. “In the process, I may have contributed to the mistaken impression that the anti-Jewish violence of the Crusades and the Inquisition defines the Catholic Church. It most certainly does not.”

He said he does not consider the phrases “apostate church” and the “great whore” to be synonymous with the Catholic Church.

Donohue, in response, issued a statement saying “this case is closed,” and

expressing hopes for stronger interfaith relations. McCain, campaigning in Washington state, told reporters Hagee's apology was "very helpful" and "a laudable thing to do."