

“60 MINUTES” SKEWS STORY ON IRISH CATHOLICS

The Catholic League did not call it bigotry, but it did say that it was tendentious. This was our take on a segment of “60 Minutes” that ran on January 3.

Entitled “Magdalen Laundries,” this piece focused on the plight of dysfunctional young women who sought care in Catholic convents in Ireland. Most of the women had lived on the fast track, winding up either pregnant out-of-wedlock or in trouble with the law. The gist of the story was that many were ill-treated in these convents.

The events described in the piece have their origin in the nineteenth century and extend to a few decades ago. Our complaint was not that “60 Minutes” cooked this whole thing up, but that it failed miserably to place these events in historical perspective. And that showed more than poor judgment.

As we conveyed to the executive producer, Don Hewitt, women who found themselves in dire circumstances were treated much more harshly by society, and often by their own families, than they were by nuns. Indeed, the convents were, for a very long time, the only institutions willing to give such women shelter. But none of this was presented to viewers, thus leaving the impression that these women were oppressed by the Church.

There is not a single institution that could be exposed to this kind of ahistorical analysis and pass muster with the standards of today. Why “60 Minutes” selected to do this story in the first place is something that is of interest all by itself. And why this program has a penchant for zeroing in on Catholicism is still another issue that fascinates us. We can

only guess why.