

# A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FROM “DATELINE”

The NBC show, “Dateline,” gave Catholics a Christmas present by featuring a segment on a Catholic-operated mental hospital that existed in Quebec a half-century ago. The segment, “Suffer the Little Children; Orphans Sent to Mental Hospitals Demand Restitution,” showed the Catholic Church at its worst; it aired on December 21.

The segment contended that children born out-of-wedlock were also sent to St. Julien’s Hospital. The point of the story was that many young children were physically and psychologically abused by the nuns who ran the institution. Nothing the nuns did that was positive was mentioned on the broadcast and no comparisons were made with other mental institutions that existed at the time.

The position of the Catholic League was outlined in a letter to NBC by William Donohue:

“My point is not to challenge the veracity of the story—it may all be true. My point is to question the decision-making process that resulted in this story and its timing. Of all the stories that may interest viewers—babies born alive in abortion clinics, the source of Rev. Al Sharpton’s income, the legalization of torture in Israel, gay sexual practices and the AIDS epidemic—‘Dateline’ chose to reach back to the first half of this century to do a piece about one Catholic-run institution in another country that just happened to air during Christmas week.”

Donohue wrote to NBC asking for an explanation. The letter he received from David McCormick, executive producer of broadcast standards, was unsatisfactory. In it, the NBC official said, “We are sorry you have taken exception to the timing of this

broadcast. However, this was not a report on the Catholic Church in general but a specific orphanage in Canada. There was no intent to criticize the role of the Church at this time of the year.”

Upon receipt of the letter, Donohue called McCormick. He asked if NBC had any plans to do a segment on any of the topics he mentioned in his letter; McCormick was non-committal. Surely viewers would like to see these shows on abortionists, Al Sharpton’s funding, Israel’s policy on torture and the gay contribution to AIDS, Donohue said. But it was clear from the conversation that the broadcast standards chief wasn’t going to give Donohue what he wanted, namely an explanation why—out of the entire universe of topics—NBC chose to do this one.

Perhaps you can squeeze McCormick for an answer. Try writing him at NBC News, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, New York 10112. You may call him at (212) 664-3984; or fax him at (212) 315-4037; or e-mail him at [David.McCormick@nbc.com](mailto:David.McCormick@nbc.com). Tell him Bill said hello.