

A POLITICAL AGENDA MARS ABC'S "NOTHING SACRED"

The following Op-Ed article was published in the *Los Angeles Times* on August 11, 1997.

Howard Rosenberg ("Nothing Sacred, but Much Ventured," August 6) likes the pilot to ABC's "Nothing Sacred" but confesses that he understands why some Catholics might be troubled, if not outraged, by the show. Let me explain why.

The central problem with the show is its blatantly political agenda: Catholics who follow the Church's teachings are painted as cold-hearted authoritarians who are knee-deep in ritual while those who dissent from the Church are seen as compassionate, likable persons who actually practice Christian virtues.

It is not for nothing that the good guys who dissent do not reject the Church's teachings on welfare reform, immigration, nuclear weapons and the death penalty. No, what they reject are the Church's teachings on sexuality. In other words, the dissidents entertain a view of sexuality that matches very well with the perspective as entertained by many in Hollywood.

Father Ray is quite a guy. When he's not tending to his soup kitchen he's instructing the faithful that it's time to "call a moratorium on the sins of the flesh." To be specific, he openly denounces the Church's teachings on abortion, contraception, homosexuality and promiscuity and declares that he's tired of being a "sexual traffic cop." We are then told that this homily was such a hit that donations are up. Dream on—the typical practicing Catholic wouldn't give another dime if he heard such nonsense.

The confessional scene is exceptional. A young woman, troubled by the prospect of an abortion, seeks guidance. And what does

Father Ray tell her? Go make up your own mind. Had she been contemplating smoking, no doubt this politically-correct priest would have counseled differently.

What conjoins the homily and the confessional scene is a statement against the magisterium. The magisterium is the Church's authoritative teaching body, comprised of the pope in communion with the bishops. Priests are expected to follow those rules just the way deans are expected to follow the rules of the college president. Father Ray, of course, is seen as a hero because he is exercising his autonomy (insubordination would be more accurate) against the magisterium on a subject that delights the heart of progressives.

David Manson, co-executive producer of the show, has expressed anxiety about "a Jew doing a piece about a Catholic priest." He has nothing to fear as the finest movies ever made about Catholics were produced by Jews. On the other hand, there is something strange about Manson's position that it is his aim "to create dialogue where not very much exists."

I have just one question for Manson: there is very little dialogue among Jews regarding groups like Jews for Jesus, so why doesn't he—or better yet, a creative Catholic producer—do a show on that topic? To be fair, a positive spin must be put on Jews for Jesus.

This is pure chutzpah. It is no more the business of Manson to create dialogue (read: dissent) among Catholics than it is the business of corporate foundations to fund anti-Catholic front groups like Catholics for a Free Choice. The reason they can't resist is because they loathe the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality.

No one is saying that the only acceptable image of Catholics is the *Song of Bernadette* or the *Bells of St. Mary's*. But something is wrong when, as Howard Rosenberg notes, for nearly

a half-century viewers have been treated to “puking on the pious.” Isn’t it time conventional Catholics were treated better?

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.

President

Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights