

ABC ASKED TO SEVER LINK WITH BELIEFNET

In June, ABC News said it would be dropping its religion correspondent, Peggy Wehmeyer. Wehmeyer was the first, and only, full-time religion correspondent in network television; she will be let go in October due to budget cuts. As a substitute, ABC said it would establish a new partnership with Beliefnet, an Internet site that focuses on religion.

We were aware of Beliefnet but didn't know too much about it. Given its prospective prominence with ABC, we decided to do a little investigating. What we found was disconcerting.

Beliefnet advertises itself as "an unbiased environment for high-quality information, inspiration, and interaction" about religion and spirituality. But even a cursory look at Beliefnet reveals that its approach to Catholicism is baiting at best and bigoted at worst.

There is a section on Beliefnet that poses questions about the major world religions. Questions posed to Muslims and Jews are mostly objective in nature and designed to elicit important sociological information. Questions posed to Catholics are different. Invitations to dissent from Catholic teachings, especially on matters dealing with women and sexuality, are rampant; Muslims and Jews are not offered opportunities to be dissidents.

Some questions and answers are downright insulting, e.g., one of the possible responses to a question on what Catholics think about priestly celibacy is, "It's a perverted concept that stands in the way of healthy sexuality—no wonder so many priests are pederasts." Here's another example: both rabbis and Catholic bishops wear skullcaps, known, respectively, as a yarmulke and a zucchetto. Beliefnet, however, poses questions

like, "Why does the Pope wear a beanie?" and "Why do Jews wear head coverings?"

There is a "Discussion" section on Catholicism that not only asks many politically-charged questions on women in Catholicism, it specifically invites non-Catholics to participate as guests. But the same section on Jews is not only respectful of Judaism, it specifically says that it is open only to Jews. Many other such examples could be given.

William Donohue had agreed to meet with the president of Beliefnet and another official to discuss his concerns.