

ABC-TV DISCOVERS "POPE JOAN"

Tonight, ABC's "Primetime" will air a segment, "On the Trail of Pope Joan," that raises questions about the possible existence of Pope Joan. Catholic League president Bill Donohue weighed in today:

"ABC has been busy questioning the divinity of Jesus for years, what with its infamous 'Search for Jesus' specials. In May of this year, it went back to the well again with a '20/20' episode questioning the resurrection of Jesus. Correspondent Elizabeth Vargas told viewers: 'Whether the resurrection proclaimed by the disciples was physical, metaphysical, or simply a hallucination—the dreams of grieving followers,' is not known. In other words, Christians have likely been duped. And tonight we learn that we've been duped again—a woman pope ruled in the ninth century.

"Diane Sawyer not only wants us to believe in Pope Joan, she takes us to exact street where she processed. 'Fact or Fiction' she exclaims! Indeed, Sawyer tells us that Pope Joan gave birth while processing. Pope Joan, she says, dressed in male garb, but this is not an historical anomaly: Sawyer shows us a picture of a woman dressed as a soldier in the U.S. Civil War and then proclaims, 'Which brings us back to Joan.' But of course. Another segue could have been little girls dressed up as GI Joe on Halloween, but that might have unsettled the sure-mouthed Sawyer.

"Sawyer does not interview either Paul Johnson, the world renowned historian and author of 'The Papacy,' nor does she interview Eamon Duffy, the brilliant historian from Cambridge and author of the magisterial volume, 'Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes.' Had she done so they would have laughed in her smug face. So who does she rely on? Donna Cross and Mary Malone. Cross wrote a novel about the mythical Pope Joan and has no standing among scholars. Malone is an

ex-nun who lost her faith and hates the Catholic Church. 'I can no longer pray,' she said in 1996, 'because of the language, and because it seemed so essential as the core of the tradition that God be male.'

"In other words, ABC's gospel has no room for Jesus but plenty of room for Pope Joan. We could squeeze more truth from a used-car salesman than we could from these people."