

# ATTACKS ON LEAGUE GROW

The success that the Catholic League has had in protesting “Nothing Sacred” has led to a rash of criticism. Much of it is simply a matter of interpretation, that is, there are those who differ with the league on the way it sees the show. But a growing number of critics have decided to target William Donohue, as if he were the issue, not the show.

Front page stories in the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *New York Observer* have shown a preference for putting a negative spin on Donohue, more than the league itself. The same is true of the lead editorial in *Commonweal*. By contrast, *America* has stuck to an honest debate on the merits of the show.

Occasionally, critics demonstrate that an underlying bias pervades their take on the show. For example, John Levesque in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* describes Kevin Anderson as “an irreverent, non-conformist parish priest trying to do the right thing within the structure of an organization that’s not high on boat-rockers.” Translated this means that priests “do the right thing” when they line up against the oppressive Catholic Church.

There was a particularly snotty article in the November issue of *GQ*. The author, Terrence Rafferty, thinks that it is the “self-deprecating ambivalence about his [Father Ray’s] priestly authority” to which the Catholic League objects. Rafferty misses the point, perhaps willingly: it is the deprecation of the teachings and traditions of the Church that the league finds offensive.

The *New York Times* likes to identify the Catholic League as a “conservative group,” thus red flagging us to their liberal readers. Notice that the *Times* never puts a political tag on such civil rights organizations as the ADL, NAACP, GLADD and

NOW. That's because the *Times* agrees with their positions and disagrees with ours.

Steve Johnson in the *Chicago Tribune* goes one better by calling the Catholic League "a fairly extreme group." We learn something about his objectivity when in the same article he describes *Commonweal* as "an independent journal for Catholic intellectuals."

Syndicated Catholic writer James Breig gave us a close-up look at his thinking when he found objectionable a TV show that depicted a 1970s priest in a stereotypical manner. He was horrified to see the priest wearing jeans, playing a guitar and taking a "Whatever" attitude towards life. But Breig thinks "Nothing Sacred" is just great.

Then we have those who like to make up things about the league so that they can attack us. Like many of our critics, Gannett writer Gary Stern likes to take issue with the Catholic League for labeling "Nothing Sacred" anti-Catholic. The problem is we never did.

Then there is the ever-fulminating Father Andrew Greeley. He writes that "William Donohue's Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is so busy trying to drive 'Nothing Sacred' off the air it seems not to have noticed the horror at Stanford." It seems Father Greeley hasn't noticed that it was the league that got Stanford to apologize for bashing Catholics and the Irish at its October 4<sup>th</sup> football game (see the last *Catalyst*). More important, this was already old news by the time Greeley wrote his piece.

The best the Catholic League can do about these things is fight back by writing letters to the editor, which we do all the time. In the case of Father Greeley, we can do one better: we can put him on our complimentary list.