

BIASED ADS HURTS STORY

The CBS affiliate in Cleveland, WOIO, recently aired a two-part series titled, *Pedophile Priests*. Immediately after the show was aired on November 17-18, William Donohue wrote to station manager Thomas Griesdorn expressing his views. He was principally concerned with the way the show singled out priests and the way the show was advertised.

The response that Donohue received was satisfactory in one regard, unsatisfactory in another. That there was a legitimate basis for a story seems plain: a former priest who was convicted of raping a young girl and sentenced to 5-25 years, was scheduled for a parole review after serving 3 years. Not unexpectedly, the family of the victim and the police involved contacted WOIO about their concerns.

After investigating the story, reporters found that when church officials learned of the priest's misconduct, they did not proceed fairly. Assuming this was the case, then it certainly was not unfair for WOIO to report on it. It is also true that the show stated that "there is no scientific evidence that there are more pedophiles in the priesthood than in any other part of the society." But the way the ads were handled is another matter altogether.

Local newspapers carried the following ad: "Dozens of priests in our area have been accused of molesting children. One or two may go to jail, but what about the others? How are they protected from the law? And who'll protect the children from repeat offenders? Find out what the church hasn't confessed in this **CBS 19 NEWS two-part special report Sunday and Monday at 11PM.**" The ad showed a picture of a priest from the bottom of his eyes down to his neck with the inscription "Pedophile Priest" written in a gag-like style across his mouth.

In fact, the two-part series discussed three cases of sexual

misconduct, none of which occurred recently (one of the three priests died in 1980). Why then, the red flags? The week that the ads appeared in newspapers was also "Sweeps Week," meaning that it was important for stations to secure high ratings. By sensationalizing the story, WOI0 did a disservice to Catholics and marred the outcome of series.

A series that takes a hard look at hard issues demands serious advertising. That is one lesson WOI0 still needs to learn.