

Catholic League Calls for Boycott of Disney

The movie "Priest," produced by the BBC and released by Miramax, a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company, provoked the Catholic League to lead a storm of protest against the film and Disney (see "[Something Stinks in the Magic Kingdom: 'PRIEST'](#)" for an analysis of the movie). The movie is arguably the most anti-Catholic movie ever made; that, at least, is the position of film critic Michael Medved, the nation's leading authority on the subject of Hollywood and religion. Catholic League president William Donohue, and board member William Lindner previewed the movie before it was released to the public. They, too, were appalled by what they had seen.

The movie opened on March 24 in New York and Los Angeles and was scheduled to open on April 14 nationwide. April 14 just happened to be Good Friday. Timing the opening to fall on Good Friday made it all but certain that the Catholic League would register a protest.

On March 23, the Catholic League held a press conference in the headquarters of the Archdiocese of New York. It was very well attended by the media; officials from Miramax were also there. Posted all over the wall that formed the backdrop to Dr. Donohue's presentation were the familiar Disney characters: Mickey Mouse, Minny Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, Snow White, the Dalmatians and, of course, various stars from the Lion King. On the table by the podium was a large stuffed version of the Lion King himself, Mufasa. Given this imagery, there was no mistaking the target of the League's attack.

Denied the right to speak at the Catholic League's press conference, Miramax representatives spoke to the media on the sidewalk in front of the Catholic Center; the next day they

staged their own press conference at their headquarters in Manhattan. The media blitz that accompanied the Catholic League's press conference, coupled with a favorable response from the public, put pressure on Miramax to change its nationwide release date from Good Friday to April 19; it was slated to open in ten cities on April 7.

The Catholic League treated as "a positive step" the decision not to release the movie on Good Friday, but it also said that more concessions were needed. If Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney, could legally stop Miramax from distributing "Priest" nationwide, then that is what the League wanted. Short of that, the League demanded a public statement from Disney dissociating itself from the film, making clear its reasons for doing so. Disney, however, chose to do nothing. Returning a phone call for Mr. Eisner, John Dryer, Vice President of Corporate Communications for Disney, told Dr. Donohue that the reason Disney would not dissociate itself from the Miramax-distributed movie was because "the only association between Disney and Miramax is the one that you've created in the mind of the public." Dryer denied a rift between Disney and Miramax and said there was nothing to the rumor that Miramax was testing Disney's will by pledging to release a soft-porn movie, "Kids." Dr. Donohue informed Mr. Dryer that he was now free to live with the consequences of his decision.

Two days after the phone conversation, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that there was a growing conflict between Disney and Miramax over the movie "Kids," quoting a Disney spokesperson as saying that whatever policy Disney ascribes to "is by association their [Miramax's] policy." More embarrassing for Disney was the *Associated Press* story of April 3 which reported that Disney told Miramax that it must "sell 'Kids' or form a separate company to release it, reimbursing the \$3.5 million to Miramax." *Time* and *Newsweek* ran a similar story, demonstrating quite conclusively that Disney can get Miramax to do exactly what it wants, when it wants.

Disney's decision not to dissociate itself from the movie triggered another news release from the Catholic League. This time the League made specific its course of action. "Having stonewalled the Catholic League-and by extension many Catholics-we are embarking on a nationwide campaign aimed at Disney. We are calling for a boycott of all Disney products, a boycott of vacations to Disney World and Disneyland and a boycott of the Disney cable television channel. We are also asking the public to call Disney and tie up the lines by making a complaint." In the wake of this call for action, Disney's lines were so overloaded that their famous 1-800-W-DISNEY number was disconnected; other lines were similarly disabled.

The Catholic League said it would mobilize its members, asking them to sell their Disney stock and send postcards to Michael Eisner registering their outrage. Pledging to work with other organizations in this initiative, the League promised it would submit a resolution at the next Disney stockholders meeting. An expert in the field, Tom Strobhar, has agreed to write the resolution; having previously tackled K-Mart, Strobhar is just the man to do the job on Disney.

On April 10, the Catholic League went on the attack again, this time in the form of an ad placed on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* (click [here](#)). The ad is just one more example of the Catholic League's determination to reeducate the public as to the new status and the new face of the Walt Disney Company.