

CBS SHOW "MICHAEL HAYES" EXPLOITS CHURCH

The October 14 episode of the new CBS show, "Michael Hayes," featured a confrontation between a U.S. District Attorney and a Catholic priest that had a decidedly ideological twist to it. The priest is observed and videotaped by the authorities while hearing the confession of a man involved in a terrorist plot.

Previously, we learn that the same priest gave sanctuary to IRA terrorists while working in Ireland. Now the priest is faced with a similar dilemma: to abide by Church rules and not break the seal of the confessional or to tell the authorities what he heard from an obviously guilty party to murder.

The judge proclaims that she will watch the tape and render a statement on its admissibility, but the viewer never learns the nature of her decision because the priest unexpectedly decides to testify as a witness for the prosecution, thereby violating his duties as a priest.

The following comment on the show was made by William Donohue:

"This episode of 'Michael Hayes' is based on the real-life event that took place in 1996 in Lane County jail in Oregon. At that time, the D.A. in Eugene surreptitiously taped a priest in the confessional and sought to use it in court. The Catholic League protested this move as a violation of the First Amendment right to freedom of religion. The D.A. subsequently apologized and pledged never to do this again.

"The worst part of this show is the conclusion that justice is better served by having a priest violate the seal of the confessional. In doing so, it promotes the pernicious idea that religion should bow to the power of government whenever there is a conflict between church and state. Adding to the

politics of the show is the portrayal of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church—in this case the Archbishop of New York—as being unconcerned about anything outside of its own parochial concerns.

“TV land seems to delight in putting a negative spin on Catholicism these days. But what is happening around the nation is encouraging: Catholics are rallying to defend their Church in an unprecedented way.”