

CRITICS CAN'T SAVE "NOTHING SACRED"

Never before in television history has a show been more praised by the critics and more panned by the public than "Nothing Sacred." Virtually every TV critic in the country has used superlatives to describe the show while demonstrating nothing but utter contempt for the public that refuses to like it. One gets the distinct feeling that if they had it their way, the critics would put a gun to every American's head and demand, "Watch it and Like it, or Else"!

Entertainment Weekly chose Kevin Anderson (Father Ray) as "Best New TV Actor," *Newsday* labeled "Nothing Sacred" as the best new show on TV next to "South Park," *TV Guide* picked Anderson as one of two "Best Newcomers" on the tube, the *New York Daily News* branded the show as one of the "joyous additions" of the year, *USA Today* listed it as the sixth best program of the fall season (praising ABC for "not caving into the tyranny of Nielsen ratings") and Anderson was nominated for a Golden Globe award.

Yet the last episode of "Nothing Sacred" for 1997 showed that it had dropped again in the ratings, making it one of the least viewed programs on all of TV. And although its ratings were no better than "C-16," "Over the Top," "Timecop," "Total Security" and "You Wish," ABC decided that "Nothing Sacred" must stay. Indeed, a total of 14 network shows were cancelled by year's end, making the decision to keep "Nothing Sacred" transparently political.

The bad ratings have had no effect on the scriptwriting. In the episode that aired December 18, Father Ray and two other priests assaulted police officers and state officials. Had their violence been directed at those who operate abortion clinics, instead of at immigration officials doing their job,

it is a sure bet that those who liked this episode would have been highly critical. But because their violence was politically acceptable, no such howls of protest were heard. The show also included a scene whereby Father Eric pleaded with Rachel, the still unrepentant woman who had an abortion, to receive Holy Communion.

The series continues this winter and spring on Saturday nights at 8:00 p.m. It will have to rely on ABC "color checks" for commercial air time since almost all the sponsors who started with the show have bolted. There are now 34 companies that have officially withdrawn their sponsorship of "Nothing Sacred" (more if one were to count those that refuse to advertise again but don't want to be listed by the league as having "pulled"). In addition, the U.S. Postal Service, which at first had planned on advertising on the show, decided not to after learning of the controversy.

Since the December *Catalyst* was printed, the following companies have joined the list of sponsors who have withdrawn their advertising: John Paul Mitchell Systems, Meineke, Fantom Technological Direct, A&M Products, Nissan, RadioShack and Chattem (maker of Gold Bond Foot Powder). About all that is left are ABC promos and John Denver CD's.

One final note. In a survey just released by the Pew Research Center, 71 percent of Americans report that they have never doubted the existence of God (up from 60 percent a decade ago). Too bad Disney/ABC couldn't have created a priest who was one of them.