

FOX GETS MESSAGE ON “SIMPSONS”

In June, Howard Rosenberg, media critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, provided an inside look into the controversy surrounding the Catholic League and its battle against the Fox TV show, “The Simpsons.” While no fan of the league’s (e.g. Rosenberg says that our “fanatical crusade against ‘Nothing Sacred’ helped drive that achingly noble ABC series off the air”), he nonetheless credits us with changing the prevailing thinking at Fox.

Rosenberg reports that “The Simpsons” executive producer, Mike Scully, is flaming mad at a Fox directive which says it’s time to lay off Catholics. When Scully complained to Roland McFarland, vice president of broadcast standards at the network, he was told that any future episodes that contain offensive lines should not be attributed to Catholics. He advised that it was okay to target “Methodists, Presbyterians or Baptists”—any group but Catholics.

One of the changes that Fox made was to delete from a rerun an offensive reference to Catholics that appeared in the initial airing of the show. The Catholic League had complained about the January 31 program that ran after the Super Bowl. When it was repeated at the end of May, the reference to “The Catholic church” was edited to read, “The church.”

Scully’s retort to this was revealing: “When I asked what would be the difference changing it to another religion, and wouldn’t that just be offending a different group of people, he [McFarland] explained that Fox had already had trouble with Catholics earlier this season.” This prompted *Los Angeles Times* critic Howard Rosenberg to question, “Different standards for different religions?”

Now consider this: all along we have been told by Fox that none of our complaints were valid because none of the material was truly offensive. But now we have a Fox executive producer disingenuously giving away his hand by protesting why it should be okay to offend another group of people with the same material he initially said wasn't offensive to Catholics! And isn't it striking that Rosenberg is upset with the fact that the double standard—which now, for the first time works positively for Catholics—is a real problem. Never do we remember Rosenberg protesting the double standard that allows “artists” to dump on Catholics while protecting most other segments of society from their assaults.

Rosenberg writes that Fox admits that the reason for the new sensitivity shown to Catholics comes from one source—the Catholic League. McFarland admits that they have been deluged with letters from angry Catholic League members.

It was the cover story of the March *Catalyst* on “The Simpsons” that was the final straw. Catholic League members made good use of the name and address that we provided, as they had on previous occasions. It only goes to prove what can be done when Catholics get actively involved.