

HARVEY WEINSTEIN vs. BILL DONOHUE

Bill Donohue

For over two decades, Harvey Weinstein and I have been at war with each other. It started in 1995 when Miramax released the anti-Catholic movie, "Priest." Miramax was the creation of the two Weinstein brothers, Bob and Harvey; the parent company was Disney.

I was president of the Catholic League for only two years at the time. I realized right from the get-go that if I let this movie slide, Disney would see it as a sign of weakness, so I pulled out all the stops.

The movie portrayed five priests, all of whom were dysfunctional. Worse, their dysfunctionality was a function of the priesthood. In other words, the teachings of the Catholic Church were responsible for their depraved condition. The cause and effect was plain, and it made all the difference.

Two of the priests in the movie were having an affair: one with the female housekeeper, and the other with his newly acquired male friend. Another priest was a drunk, the country pastor was a madman, and the bishop was simply wicked.

At the end of the movie, the straight priest who was sleeping with the housekeeper defends the gay priest in front of the congregation. Using vulgar language, he asks the faithful at Mass whether God cares what men do with their sex organ, beckoning them to focus their attention on such real outrages as war, famine, and disaster.

I made the decision to confront Disney/Miramax, or what Cardinal John O'Connor called Disneymax, so I held a press conference at the Catholic Center of the Archdiocese of New

York. Surrounding the podium were huge toy animals featuring the Lion King, Mickey Mouse, Pluto, and the like. I wanted to make this all about Disney.

I had been tipped off that several executives from Disney/Miramax were in the audience. So I began by telling them to get out. I told them they could hold their own press conference in the street, where they belonged. They quickly grabbed their coats and pocketbooks and made a beeline to the door. The TV cameramen loved it.

The movie was scheduled to open on Good Friday, but after our protest caught fire, they quickly backed down, releasing it on a later date. It turned out to be a dud anyway, though some Jesuit priests loved it.

The next confrontation was even wilder. In 1999, the movie "Dogma" was released, but not before I obtained a copy of the script. The film featured Jesus and Mary having sex. A descendant of theirs was a lapsed Catholic who works in an abortion clinic. God was played by Alanis Morissette, a vulgar actress. The 13th apostle resembled Jerry Springer.

After reading the script, which I obtained the year before it hit the big screen, I wrote to Disney CEO Michael Eisner. "It looks as though Catholic sensibilities will be offended once again. Perhaps it is not too late for something to be done about this," I said.

On April 5, 1999, I issued a news release, "Disney/Miramax Poised to Anger Catholics Again." What prompted the release were news stories citing entertainment sources saying the Catholic League is going to go nuts when this movie is released. Two days later, Miramax faxed me its news release saying that Eisner told the Weinsteins that the movie could not use the Disney/Miramax label. This meant that the Weinstein brothers had to invest \$14 million of their own dollars to finance the film.

This was an important victory—Eisner bowed to our pressure. We didn't give up: we set our sights on having Disney sever all ties with Miramax. That eventually happened.

The drama was only beginning. Bully lawyers for the Weinsteins tried to intimidate me. They failed miserably. Here's what happened.

After "Dogma" star Ben Affleck remarked that "This movie is definitely meant to push buttons," I responded by saying, "The Catholic League has a few buttons to push, and we will not hold back." I thought nothing of it—it was just a tit-for-tat. Then I received a threatening letter from the Los Angeles firm of Mitchell, Silberberg & Knupp, representing the Weinsteins.

The firm chose Dan Petrocelli to go after me. He was a real heavyweight. Alan Dershowitz once said he was the best attorney in the nation. Among his victories was his successful prosecution of O.J. Simpson in a civil suit. But he ran into a brick wall when he tangled with me.

Here is what Petrocelli said:

"Statements like these may be interpreted to announce or imply an intention by the League to go beyond the bounds of legitimate and peaceful dissent or protest, and to stimulate, motivate, or incite danger or violence. Please be advised any such impermissible activity authorized, committed, or encouraged by the League that harms or threatens harm to any person will not be tolerated. We intend to hold the League fully accountable for any wrongdoing, injury, or damage it causes."

The letter was sent Overnight Priority Federal Express to the Catholic League at our office; we rented space at the time from the Archdiocese of New York. I immediately faxed Petrocelli the following missive: "You erroneously sent your threatening letter to 101 First Avenue. Our address is 1011 First Avenue. Please make a note of it."

After toying with the Weinstein firm, I then went public with their letter, and with my response:

"The letter by the Weinstein attorneys is wonderful. It proves who the true enemies of free speech really are. Now I don't even have to argue this issue anymore—all I need do is present their letter. It settles everything.

"I don't know how many years it has been since the lawyers of Mitchell, Silberberg & Knupp last took a course in constitutional law. But even if they are slip and fall hacks, they should know better.

"The Catholic League protest of 'Dogma' will now proceed with even more vigor than ever before. Fascistic attempts to silence us will never win."

I wasn't finished. Not only did I hold a press conference and write a critical booklet on "Dogma," which was widely distributed, I took out an op-ed page ad in the *New York Times* going after Disney for not dumping Miramax altogether. We were on the offense; Eisner and the Weinsteins knew it.

In 2002, Eisner was back in the fold with the Weinsteins. "40 Days and 40 Nights" was another Catholic-bashing film, though not as vulgar as the others. Just as it was about to open Disney held its annual shareholders' meeting in Hartford, Connecticut. On the day of the meeting, I took out an ad in the *Hartford Courant* asking Disney shareholders to dump Miramax.

The pressure we exerted was paying off. Disney's stock was plummeting: it dropped 32 percent between 2001 and 2002. Eisner was worried. In 2005, Disney officially split from Miramax.

The split didn't stop the Weinsteins from assaulting Catholicism. We waged war on Miramax in 2003 when it released "The Magdalene Sisters." It was the creation of Peter Mullan, who at the time compared the Catholic Church to the Taliban.

The movie portrayed all nuns as wicked persons who exploited unwed mothers. Mullan admitted that the movie "encapsulated everything that is bad about the Catholic Church." Two honest board members of the Venice Film Festival rightfully called it "anti-Catholic propaganda."

Catholics received a Christmas gift from the Weinsteins in 2003, and again in 2006. In 2003, they offered "Bad Santa," and three years later they delivered "Black Christmas." The former was the worst. Santa was presented as a chain-smoking, drunken, foul-mouthed, suicidal, sexual predator. He was depicted having sex with a bartender in a car and performing anal sex on a huge woman in a dressing room.

Next up was "Philomena." The Weinsteins really thought they would earn an Oscar for it, and indeed Harvey lobbied hard for it. His efforts were in vain. The 2014 film was based on a series of lies, many of which I detailed in a booklet.

The movie featured Judi Dench playing Philomena Lee, a young girl who got pregnant out-of-wedlock in Ireland in 1952 when she was 18-years-old. That part was true. But it was a malicious lie to say the nuns stole her baby and then sold him "to the highest bidder." It was also a lie to say Philomena went to the U.S. to find him.

We went after this propaganda film big time, so much so that those associated with it began to walk back their story. All of a sudden it became a movie that was "inspired" by true events. Harvey tried to manipulate Pope Benedict XVI into seeing it, but he failed.

Now the Weinsteins are working on "Mary Magdalene." Perhaps it would be more accurate to say Bob is working on it. Harvey is in therapy. He should be in jail.

Hollywood has long been home to anti-Catholics, and no one sits higher on this throne of bigotry than Harvey Weinstein. He tried to silence me, but failed. Now his own people have

turned on him.

There remains an issue that is bigger than Harvey Weinstein: the insatiable appetite for Catholic bashing that marks Tinseltown.

Late-night talk show hosts never stop ripping priests, making generalizations about them that they would never say about any of the many protected demographic groups. So why do they hate us so much?

There are many reasons why, but none is more important than sex. It is Hollywood that is obsessed with sex, not the Catholic Church (I can't remember the last time I heard a homily about sex). Hollywood is the land of free love, sexual exploitation, pederasty, and womanizing. It preaches a sexual ethic that knows no boundaries.

Then there is the Catholic Church. It respects boundaries and is opposed to the kind of sexual recklessness that Hollywood basks in. That's why it is hated. Yes, there have been priests who have acted badly, but every one of them violated the teachings of the Church. By contrast, Hollywood celebrities and executives who prey on others are acting in compliance with their "ethic" of libertinism.

The revelations about Harvey Weinstein are one thing. What about all the other big shots in Hollywood? What about all the journalists, lawyers, and politicians in the pockets of these men? Most of all, what about all the children who have been raped, groped, and exploited by these power brokers? While some of their stories have leaked out, there is so much more we don't know.

It takes no courage to condemn Hollywood titans who abuse women and children. But it takes plenty of guts to condemn the kinds of morally debased fare that Hollywood delivers. Let's face it, Hollywood is the most important cultural player in the nation (at least in the secular segment of society), and

what it has done to our culture can no longer be tolerated.

To some extent, we are all a product of our environment. Now ask yourself: What kind of environment has Hollywood crafted since the days when "Sound of Music" was released?

"What goes around, comes around." That may be trite, but it is often true. Just ask Harvey Weinstein.