

HBO OFFERS TABLOID LOOK AT CATHOLIC CHURCH

On May 6, Home Box Office aired *Priestly Sins: Sex and the Catholic Church*. The one hour special focused on the issue of sexual abuse in the priesthood. We were told that the problem is one of "epic" proportions and that the root cause is celibacy. The Catholic League issued the following news release on the film and called for a boycott of HBO:

"The HBO production, *Priestly Sins*, is to serious scholarship what the *Enquirer* is to serious journalism. Tabloid sensationalism has a market, but it was not known until now that HBO was a player in this field.

"The film is classic propaganda, moving from anecdote to generalization. The accompanying music and flashes of cathedrals, church doors and statues are used to create a mystical background, against which horror stories unfold. Now no one doubts that some priests have failed miserably in their duties and that innocent persons have been cruelly hurt. But sentiments of sorry and anger should not be used to mask the demands of honest reporting.

"Honest reporting would require that when Richard Sipe (an ex-priest) arrives at a figure of 3,000 sexual abusers among 50,000 priests (6 percent) he is actually referring to sexual **tendencies**, not actual behavior (see the book by Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*). Honest reporting would mandate that the figure of clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic priesthood is less than the figure among the non-celibate Protestant clergy (between .2 to 1.7 percent for priests and between 2-3 percent for ministers). Honest reporting would disclose that Father John McNeill, who offers what he 'thinks' the incidence of abuse might be, is actually the co-founder of Dignity, a homosexual group that

openly rejects Catholic teaching and has no standing in the Church.

"No comparative data with other segments of society are presented. Moreover, we hear nothing about false accusations, tarnished careers, greedy lawyers or obsequious therapists. And there is nothing about anti-Catholic bigotry.

"HBO is not the first to float the idea that a 'code of secrecy' keeps the Church from revealing the truth about clergy sexual abuse: that honor extends to the Nazis and others.

"The Catholic League will call on all Catholics to boycott HBO and will provide its members with preprinted postcards that can be sent to the company."