

HBO PROTEST WORKS

The Catholic League protest against HBO left a message that won't be lost. Between the formal protest registered by Catholic bishops, the thousands of postcards and letters that league members sent, and the meeting that Dr. Donohue had with HBO officials, there is little doubt that HBO won't be doing a sequel to Priestly Sins.

On May 7, league president William Donohue met with three senior officials from HBO. He began by admitting that the Catholic Church—like all other institutions and segments of our society—has dirty laundry, but curiously HBO has shown no interest in projecting the dirty laundry of any other group. So he offered a few suggestions.

Donohue asked HBO officials why they don't do a show on why Native Americans have such a high rate of alcoholism. He said that a show that explained why Methodist ministers have a divorce rate that is double the national average would be a good one. He suggested a show on African American men and the concept of fatherhood.

Another recommendation was to do a show on the gay contribution to the AIDS disease. Finally, he advised them to do a show on why Jews are so over-represented in Hollywood.

The HBO officials picked up on Donohue's facetiousness by remaining mute. His point was that none of the shows he "recommended," nor Priestly Sins, is responsible television fare. They then settled into a lengthy discussion about Priestly Sins.

In essence, the argument that Donohue made was that it is always wrong to treat social issues out of social context, and that when no comparative data are presented, it gives the viewer a false picture. He also objected to the way statistics were bandied about as if they were authoritative when, in

fact, they are not.

As a corrective to the show, HBO officials entertained the idea of broadcasting a symposium on the film, whereby Donohue could participate with eight or nine others in a discussion of Priestly Sins. Donohue rejected the idea and instead suggested that HBO televise a debate between him and any three experts in the country that HBO chose. But they wouldn't bite. The talk ended on a cordial though disagreeable note.

As a result of all the protests, HBO decided to put a disclaimer at the end of Priestly Sins, the effect of which was to say that the figures cited in the program represent only the opinions of the speakers and are not necessarily correct.

This was a small admission, but an important one. Coupled with the heat generated by the league, it is clear that HBO will not forget the strength and depth of the Catholic voice.

May 8, 1996

Times Picayune

Letters Editor

3800 Howard Avenue

New Orleans, LA 70140

Dear Editor:Mark

Lorando ("Catholic Crisis," May 6) seems to like the HBO program, "The Priestly Sins." Here's a few things for him to think about.

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. It is for all these reasons that 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. Having just met with HBO officials, I am convinced that the boycott must go forward.

Sincerely,
William A. Donohue
President