

HBO SPINS “MAPPLETHORPE”

HBO recently aired a documentary called “Mapplethorpe: Look at the Pictures.”

Robert Mapplethorpe was a homosexual who lived a reckless life; he died in 1989 at the age of 42. He was also known for his tortured relationship with the Catholic Church. But no one would know this from watching the HBO celebration of him.

“I think the way I arrange things is very Catholic,” he is quoted as saying, “even though I was never a religious person.” The film uses this as a platform to understand his fixation on Satan. To Mapplethorpe, Satan was not some evil figure; rather, he was a convivial playmate who enjoyed seducing young women. According to one of the photographer’s friends, he also thought there was “something very ritualistic about sadomasochism,” noting that it was “kind of a Black Mass.”

What the documentary did not focus on was Mapplethorpe’s vicious assault on New York’s Cardinal John O’Connor. In a catalog featuring Mapplethorpe’s work, he is quoted as saying, “This fat cannibal from the house of walking swastikas up on fifth avenue should lose his tax exempt status and pay retroactive taxes for the last couple of centuries.”

For the record, Cardinal O’Connor quietly visited hospitals that tended to AIDS patients, cleaning their bed pans. Those who, like Mapplethorpe, behaviorally contracted AIDS—and died of it—were the ones whom O’Connor helped. Indeed, the Archdiocese of New York, under his tutelage, did more to help AIDS patients than any other private provider in New York City.

HBO clearly decided that viewers need not know anything about this, which is why it was not reported. Why should they—it would only complicate their lives and get in the way of the

documentary's narrative.