

HUNCHBACK DRAWS VARIED RESPONSE

Disney's summer hopes were pinned on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, but more was at stake than box office receipts. *Entertainment Weekly* said that Disney is "still smarting from the controversy over Miramax's *Priest*" and that is why it "dodged a potential outcry from conservatives by changing Frollo from the cleric he was in Hugo's novel to a pious judge." Indeed, Disney studio chairman Joe Roth commented that "most of our nun and priest jokes are *not* in."

None of this is to say that *Hunchback* fails to offend. *Entertainment Weekly* remarked of the movie's "sensual undertones and scary scenes," one of which it labeled "hot and heavy." Then there is the "Hellfire" scene where Frollo "fantasizes about the curvaceous Gypsy Esmeralda belly dancing inside his fireplace. 'Hellfire, hellfire, there's a fire in my skin,' he moans. 'This burning desire is turning me to sin.'" It is no wonder *Entertainment Weekly* called the movie "the darkest, most adult animated film Disney has ever made."

Our Sunday Visitor, one of the nation's leading Catholic newspapers, was also leery of *Hunchback*. Its take on the "Hellfire" segment was that it "is a long prayer to the Blessed Mother, in which he[Frollo] thanks God that he is righteous, unlike the pagans and others. He then describes his lust for the gypsy girl Esmeralda and blames her for being so seductive and tempting him to 'sin.'" Not for nothing, then, does *Our Sunday Visitor* score *Hunchback* as "NC-not for Catholics."

What makes this so fascinating is that the *New York Times* not only did not see any of the objections that *Entertainment Weekly* and *Our Sunday Visitor* spotted, it actually issued a flash warning to parents that the movie might be objectionable

due to its Christian flavor. Along with the proverbial warnings regarding "Violence," "Sex" and "Profanity," the *New York Times* did something unprecedented and listed a "Footnote," the contents of which were: "The movie is sprinkled with Christian images, and there are specific references to God."

"Specific references to God"? You got it folks, not only does the *New York Times* not see what others see as offensive, it now finds it necessary to categorize "references to God" as equally dangerous to children as violence, sex and profanity.

Stay tuned and you'll soon discover that the *Times* will endorse a "G" chip, one which would allow viewers to screen for movies that mention God. At least it's nice to know that the moral relativists and tolerant types at the *Times* actually find some things objectionable, even if what tests their limits suggests an animus so incredible as to be objectionable itself.