

# IS THE MET'S "TOSCA" SACRILEGIOUS?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on director Luc Bondy's version of Puccini's "Tosca," which opened this week at the Metropolitan Opera in New York:

I did not go on opening night to see this gem—I snatched a ticket online to see the dress rehearsal on September 17. The only reason I went was because of reports that at the end of Act I there was an obscene sexual act that took place between Scarpia, the bad guy chief of secret police, and a statue of Our Blessed Mother. Alas, there wasn't. Though perhaps some liberties were taken on opening night.

The *Vancouver Sun* reported that "the evil Scarpia fondles a statue of the Virgin Mary." *Financial Times* says "the villainous police chief assaults a statue of the holy Virgin in carnal embrace." The *New York Times* called it a "sacrilegious embrace," while Bloomberg observed that "Scarpia paws" the statue. What I witnessed was an embrace, but there was nothing carnal about it. Nonetheless, what the *Wall Street Journal* reported was accurate: "Mr. Bondy added a little anticlerical joke in Act I by having the Sacristan...fill the holy water stoup and wash Cavaradossi's brushes using water from the same bucket, and then gobble the painter's lunch while reciting the Angelus." Smart alecky, but not egregious.

The *New York Times* was right to say that the church setting as created by Richard Peduzzi had a "disorienting look." Similarly, the *New Jersey Star Ledger* noted that "the church was cold, unadorned brick," while the *Washington Post* said the church looked "almost like a postwar reconstruction of an ancient cathedral." AP nailed it best: "The church in Act I is virtually devoid of religious trappings, and its looming arched brick walls make it look more like a prison than a

place of worship.”

The best thing to happen on opening night was the eruption of boos that greeted Luc Bondy when he appeared on stage following the performance. I merely yawned. On the other hand, I bolted after Act I. Thank God I had tickets to see Aretha Franklin at Radio City the next night. I needed some relief. So, no, “Tosca” is not sacrilegious. It’s just a bore.