

MONEY, NOT ETHICS, GUIDES DISNEY SHAKEUP

“Bob [Chapek] is the right leader at the right time for The Walt Disney Company, and the Board has full confidence in him and his leadership team.” That’s what Susan Arnold, chairman of the board, said in June when Chapek was unanimously elected to a three-year term as the Disney CEO.

On November 20, Chapek was fired. Arnold wrote, “We thank Bob Chapek for his service to Disney over his long career...”

What went wrong so fast? When the markets closed on November 18, Disney stock had lost 40% of its value last year. Disney’s streaming business lost \$1.5 billion in the fourth quarter. Talk of massive layoffs and a hiring freeze have seen employee morale take a nose dive.

Among Chapek’s lousy decisions was his caving into a loud, but small, group of LGBT employees and activists. They wanted to thrust Disney into the culture war head-first by opposing a parental rights bill championed by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis; the bill barred teaching kids in pre-K through third grade about sexuality.

Chapek initially resisted getting involved in this issue because he didn’t think it was good policy for Disney to become a political actor. But he quickly gave in to pressure and apologized for not getting involved.

After Chapek enlisted Disney on the side of the groomers—encouraging kids to question whether they are happy being a boy or girl—he incurred a backlash. Not only did parents condemn what he did, Gov. DeSantis stripped Disney of its special tax status (the company had previously been allowed to function like a municipality).

Chapek held on but his days were numbered. So distraught were Disney executives that they have brought back Robert Iger for two years. Iger replaced Michael Eisner as CEO in 2005; after Chapek took over in 2020, he remained as chairman through 2021.

The money boys on Wall Street, who care not a fig about Disney's war on traditional moral values, are cheering Iger's return. Parents should not.

In 1998, five years into this job as president and CEO of the Catholic League, Bill Donohue locked horns with Iger—it was the first of many battles—when he was president of ABC. [We had recently killed the ABC show, “Nothing Sacred,” by going after the advertisers.] He had just told the National Association of Broadcasters that it was ill-advised to put the Jerry Springer show on TV. “Programs that are embarrassments to our business will, in the long run, alienate our viewers.”

Really? As Donohue pointed out in a letter to the *Wall Street Journal* right after Iger spoke, ABC had just aired a show, “That’s Life,” that was beyond the pale. Here is part of what he said.

“The show trashed Christ’s crucifixion, the Host, transubstantiation, Holy Water, Catholic prayers, Midnight Mass, salvation, Catholic rituals, the Vatican, the New Testament, the Stations of the Cross, Confession, nuns, priests and laypersons. That it was shown during Holy Week, with specific references to Easter, was all the more incredible.”

In 1995, two years into this job—the same year Disney bought ABC—Donohue held a press conference at the Archdiocese of New York criticizing Disney’s film distributor, Miramax, for making the anti-Catholic movie, “Priest.” Disney’s Miramax, under the tutelage of Harvey and Bob Weinstein, continued to offend Catholics by releasing a slew of bigoted flicks. In

more recent times, ABC's "The O'Neals" and "Family Guy" treated Catholics the way they would never treat LGBT people.

Iger is not content to make children's fare that services a radical agenda. He has a passion for abortion rights. In 2019, he led Hollywood studios to gang up on Georgia over newly passed restrictions on abortion. As Donohue pointed out at the time, this was rich. Hollywood goes out of its way to eroticize the culture, sending the wrong signals to young people, and then when promiscuity leads some women to opt for an abortion, Tinseltown just winks.

Iger refuses to connect the dots, except when it comes to smoking. In 2007, Iger said Disney "will place an anti-smoking PSA [Public Service Announcement] on DVD's of any future film that does depict smoking."

In other words, depictions of smoking on the big screen may induce young people to smoke, but depictions of sex have no behavioral consequences. Iger knows better—he can't have it both ways.

The governing board at Disney did not fire Chapek because he caved into the groomers. They fired him for financial reasons, not cultural ones. They are the real problem, and now they have gone back to the well, dragging up their most ethically challenged hack from the past.