

# NOT FOR NOTHING IS “NOTHING” LAST

They said it couldn't be done. No one believed it was possible. But they did it. They broke their own record: on March 7, “Nothing Sacred” posted ratings so bad—only 6% of the available audience watched it—that one TV insider said this represents “reverse appointment viewing,” meaning, he said, that 94% made plans *not* to watch the show.

The March 7 show scored 3.1 in the ratings when aired at 9:00 p.m., EST. As the *New York Post* put it, “That’s worse than many of the series on mini-networks WB and UPN—which is why industry insiders yesterday were buzzing that ABC will pull the priest drama from the lineup as soon as this week.”

The league wasted no time informing the media of what it thought about the news:

“The handwriting has been on the wall from last September, but the politically brazen writers, producers and directors of ‘Nothing’ refuse to listen to the voice of grassroots Catholics. However, they can’t buck the market and that’s the beauty of a democracy.

“The apologists for ‘Nothing’ have said for months that the reason the show is a bomb is because it is forced to compete with NBC’s star-studded Thursday night lineup. So ABC switched the show to Saturday night. When that didn’t work, actor Kevin Anderson complained that too many people were ‘frying eggs’ at 8:00 p.m. So ABC switched the show to 9:00 p.m. And now the show has broken its own lousy record, making the Nielsen auditors wonder if the only Catholics left watching the show are those too comatose to know what they’re watching.

“Maybe they should put the show on at 3:00 a.m., that way they wouldn’t have to fight the competition or worry about people

flipping eggs. But it seems their minds are too scrambled to figure that one out."

The *Washington Post* gave "Nothing" fans more bad news when it said that the show was tied for 107<sup>th</sup> place after the first 11 episodes. Indeed, ABC has already announced that it is canceling the last two shows. There's a reason for this: the last two episodes would mean that "Nothing" would run during the beginning of the May Sweeps and ABC can't let that happen.

The March 14 episode of "Nothing" explains why the show is a loser. When Father Ray's mother calls him "Father Ray," he objects, saying "Please don't call me that." On this one, we have to agree: social workers are not priests. Indeed, even one of the cops (this "religious" show loves violence) says to Ray's family, "You don't need a cop, you need a social worker." It would be more accurate to say that the family needs a priest.

In the same show, Father Leo exclaims from the pulpit, "I stopped preaching when I lost my faith in the Resurrection." League members should know that this show was hailed by the *Tidings*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, as worthy of a "Lenten reflection." Also in this episode, when Ray's status as a priest is noted, he snaps "it's not a compliment," thus baring his soul yet again. Most interesting, too, was his quip that he wants his dysfunctional family to love one another, "without the drinking, the religion," etc. Now that's worth at least a half-dozen Lenten reflections.

Disney's in a jam over more than "Nothing." When Michael Eisner of Disney took over ABC in 1995, the network was in first place. In 1997 it slipped to third place, prompting Eisner to remark that he never would allow ABC to finish third again. He was right: in March it was announced that ABC had slipped to fourth place. This was the first time in television history that a new network, in this case FOX, actually captured more viewers than one of the original big three.

The Disney/ABC gang have only themselves to blame. They put on shows like "Soul Man," which is a smash, and spend virtually nothing to promote it, all because ABC Entertainment president Jamie Tarses doesn't like it. According to one TV executive, "ABC is embarrassed that the show ['Soul Man'] is a success because it goes against their plan to yuppify the network." But Tarses likes "Nothing" and sticks with it even when its ratings plummet.

One of the reasons why Tarses is failing is because she's listening to the wrong people. For example, we now have the spectacle of Father Andrew Greeley pointing his finger at ABC claiming that the network is anti-Catholic because it's having second thoughts about airing a "Nothing" episode about a gay priest dying of AIDS. Not for nothing, we say, is "Nothing" in last place. And not for nothing is the last laugh on them.