

OBSESSED WITH “NOTHING”

They just can't get over it. “Nothing Sacred” has been officially cancelled by ABC and its fans, few though they are, are having cardiac arrest.

USA Today is in a tailspin over the matter, and that is why long after the show was booted, it continues to publicize its lament. The newspaper took a poll to see which shows its readers think should not have gotten the gate, and “Nothing” topped the list for ABC shows. The paper said that the show “seemed to generate the most impassioned pleas by viewers.” No doubt it did: when “Nothing” died, so did a part of its fans. That's because they lived vicariously through “Nothing,” fantasizing about a church they'd love to see exist. In your dreams, we say.

What's striking about the Catholic League's victory is that ABC is getting it from all sides. It offended most Catholics by airing the show and it offended dissident Catholics when it was pulled. Celeste Mills of Ingalls, Michigan was quoted as saying, “They ripped it around the schedule like a dirty rag, then canceled it with no warning. ABC never gave it a chance.” Robert Bianco of *USA Today* said the same thing, complaining that “most viewers were scared away from *Sacred* [sic] by deadly time slots on Thursday and Saturday, and a botched marketing job by ABC, which allowed the show to be cast as some dirt-digging expose of the Catholic Church.”

Time for a reality check. Had “Nothing” been just another TV show, it would have been dropped after the first few episodes. But because the show was political propaganda disguised as entertainment, ABC had too much invested in it—ideologically, that is—to kick it in the can. So it searched in vain for a new night and new time slot. But that didn't work either, making it plain that it's hard to make something out of “Nothing.”

Bianco is so upset that he thinks the end of "Nothing" might foretell the end of TV! No kidding, here's what he said: "If there's no room for that kind of sacredness on TV (the kind 'Nothing' dished out), then perhaps the medium truly is a lost cause." Taps, anyone?

National Catholic Reporter can't give it up, either. In a recent editorial, it urged the Odyssey channel to invest in "Nothing," but warned that the channel had better toughen up a bit. It was disturbed to learn that Odyssey "has a policy that says it will not air anything that offends any faith tradition." The *Reporter* was furious with such civility, lecturing the channel to realize that "good television" means "raising questions and giving voice to opinions that some find uncomfortable." It concluded by saying that "If Odyssey really wants to become indispensable, it will have to allow some room for material that pushes the envelope." That's called showing your hand.

Whatever one thinks about "Nothing," there is no doubting that the Catholic League made ABC pay a big price for its politics. Executive producer David Manson doesn't think that the league's protest made a difference in terms of viewership, but with advertisers, it did. "I think it was fairly effective. It doesn't take much to scare them off. I think ABC took a bath on the show."

We're still getting letters condemning us for what we did. Our favorite was a letter in the *Evangelist*, the diocesan newspaper of Albany. E.P. Martinek of Round Lake said that William Donohue "should be disbarred." He, she or it didn't say from what, but we liked the headline that the newspaper put on the letter so much—"Impeach William Donohue"—that we had it framed. It's proudly and prominently displayed in Donohue's office.