

# PBS: HERE THEY GO AGAIN!

Fear of being anti-Catholic was on the mind of a PBS anchor at New York's affiliate, WNET. On March 11, the station re-broadcast a 1990 documentary called *The Burning Times*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada. In celebrating women's history month and in raising money during their pledge drive, WNET aired this program which described the history of witch burnings, attributing them mostly to the Catholic Church during medieval times.

During the break midway through the program, Mr. Roman, the anchor, interviewed Dr. Serenity Young, a scholar, about the documentary. He asked her if it were fair to ascribe the majority of the blame to Catholicism and the state it shaped. She said it was fair because the Church was actively involved in what happened to women. He then asked if there were a 'benign' side to the Church's activities. She said yes, but not when it came to witchcraft. He then continued, asking if this program were appropriate in light of the fact that this was public television and the station was seeking money from the audience, which probably included adherents of this religion. Her answer was that this is women's history and it must be told. PBS is the only station which would put on such programming.

Mr. Roman's frequent questions indicate that, although he had no intentions of offending Catholics, the station was well aware of the potential offense to Catholics and all Christians. He seemingly understood the irony of criticizing and insulting a group and then proceeding to ask for donations. That he thought the documentary might be too harsh and biased is indicative that the league's negative reaction was not completely subjective or unexpected. The result and the intention were the same: no one denied that the Church was being targeted for perceived wrongs. Whatever the documentary's intent, the station knew the result, which

explains the host's questions.

The greatest irony is that the PBS show was not a fact-based story of a seamy aspect of Christian history. It was a propaganda piece, designed to advance New Age perspectives at the expense of Christianity. It promoted the feminist agenda and in no way tried to be balanced as documentaries are supposed to be. Starhawk, a witch/political activist, was interviewed and was said to teach at a Catholic school, which was unnamed. The truth is, she was associated with a spirituality institute that was no more Catholic than Catholics for a Free Choice. It was run by a Father Matthew Fox, who no longer is a Catholic priest. His assertions were presented as true, without actual proof.

Among the false statements that the program presented as fact were the following: that Mary, the Blessed Virgin, was worshipped as a goddess; that her titles, Queen of Heaven and Mother of God, are indicative of her divine status; that, although Joan of Arc gave her voices saints' names, they were really pagan spirits from her youth; that the Church hierarchy scapegoated women by declaring them witches and burning them alive to displace blame from themselves for societal ills; and that the Church changed doctrine, elevating the devil to a higher position so as to have a targeted enemy.

The spin of the show was that before Christianity oppressed women and inverted the way things were done, women were leaders, healers, and counselors. The show indicated that paganism was a great way of being one with nature, letting women enjoy equality. This historical revisionism is what the league has come to expect from PBS.