

“PHILOMENA” IS A MALICIOUS FRAUD

Of all the movies up for an Oscar this year, “Philomena” is by far the one that Catholics, and the public-at-large, need to be wary about. What has been peddled as a true story is, in fact, untrue. Worse, it deliberately paints the Catholic Church in a negative way, and is especially cruel to Irish nuns.

“Philomena” is such an outrageous lie that Bill Donohue exposed it in a lengthy article, “Debunking Philomena.” Copies were sent to the bishops, those in the entertainment industry, and to many in the media; scores of reporters in the U.S., England, and Ireland were mailed a copy. It is posted on the Catholic League website; see “Special Reports” section.

The crux of the matter is this: according to the book (of the same name), upon which the movie is based, Philomena Lee got pregnant out-of-wedlock in Ireland in 1952 when she was 18-years-old. That part is true. But it is a malicious lie to say that the nuns stole her baby and then sold him to “the highest bidder.” It is also a lie to say that Philomena went to the U.S. to find him.

In reality, Philomena’s mother died when she was six, leaving her father to care for three boys and three girls. He put the girls in a convent and raised the boys. When Philomena got pregnant, and could not provide for her child, her father contacted the nuns asking for assistance.

In other words, the nuns never “stole” the baby. Moreover, Philomena’s baby was not sold to “the highest bidder”: no fee of any sort was charged. The Wisconsin couple who adopted the boy offered a donation, which is customary, but it was entirely voluntary. And Philomena never set foot in the United

States until the end of last year when she was hawking the movie—no attempt was ever made to find her son. Her son died of AIDS in the mid-1990s.

When the writer, the director, and the actors involved are asked about criticism by the Catholic League, they quickly say that the movie is “inspired” by true events. To show how utterly dishonest they are, consider the last paragraph of the book’s Prologue. The author, Martin Sixsmith, says, “Everything that follows is true, *or* reconstructed to the best of my ability.” (Our italic.)

The word “everything” is an absolute—it allows for no exceptions. But Sixsmith can’t even complete the sentence without contradicting himself: as soon as “or” is added, the claim is no longer absolute. It gets better.

“Gaps have been filled,” Sixsmith says, “characters extrapolated, and incidents surmised”; this is also how the film starts. The gaps, it turns out, are gargantuan, but he is a master at filling them.

Most of those associated with the film are from England, so it is hardly surprising to see the Irish depicted in a negative light. The Weinstein boys, Harvey and Bob, distributed the movie: they are no strangers to anti-Catholicism, having given us such beauties as “Priest,” “The Butcher Boy,” “Dogma,” “40 Days and 40 Nights,” “The Magdalene Sisters,” “Bad Santa,” and “Black Christmas.”

Harvey Weinstein proved how diabolical he is when he went to Switzerland in January to meet with Vatican officials: he wanted the pope to see the film in a private screening. He failed. Father Federico Lombardi of the Holy See Press Office said, “The Holy Father does not see films and will not be seeing this one.”

However, two Vatican officials did agree to see it. Immediately, it was said that Pope Francis’ “personal

secretary" saw it. Floating this lie was Steve Coogan, a co-producer of the movie and the person who adapted the book for the screen, as well as several media outlets on both sides of the Atlantic. The person they identified as the pope's personal secretary, Msgr. Guillermo Karcher, is actually one of nine papal masters of ceremonies; he is not even the main master. Msgr. Alfred Xuereb is the pope's secretary.

There were more lies. Coogan told CNN that Philomena Lee was invited by the Vatican to meet with the pope. In fact, the two of them shook hands with the pope behind a wall, as part of the general audience, which is open to the public.

MSNBC host Richard Liu took up the Weinstein party line by mouthing all sorts of lies, and Coogan played right along with him, providing new fodder. Charlie Rose of CBS was another "useful idiot." By contrast, Christiane Amanpour of CNN, and Andrea Mitchell of NBC, were fair.

The Weinsteins have spent an enormous amount of money advertising this movie, especially in the *New York Times*. That's because this is not just a film: it is a propaganda statement designed to undercut the moral voice of Catholicism.

The hatred of the Catholic Church that many in the entertainment business have is no secret; we have documented it many times over. But when large amounts of cash are spent on selling a movie that is riddled with vicious lies about Catholicism, and passed off as if it were true, it is cause for outrage.

We wouldn't be surprised if the Weinsteins showed a cropped photo of Philomena and the pope on Oscar night. It would certainly be consistent with their deceitful tactics.