

“PICKET FENCES” CARICATURES CATHOLIC TEACHINGS

The December 8 episode of the CBS program, “Picket Fences,” caricatured Roman Catholic teachings on marriage and sexuality. The show involved the arrival of Pope John Paul II in the fictional small town of Rome, Wisconsin. During the parade, a man is shot. The death is listed as a suicide. However, the Pope testifies in court that he saw a man shoot the victim.

At the trial, the defense attorney seeks to establish bias on the part of the Pope and thereby discredit his testimony. The victim was married, divorced and is gay; the accused was his lover. The bias that the attorney seeks to uncover extends to the Catholic Church’s teachings on sexuality.

At the request of William Donohue, David E. Kelley, the show’s producer (and writer of this episode), sent him a copy of the tape for previewing it. The following statement was then released to the press:

“David Kelley tells me that this episode ‘is not about tenets of Catholicism, the target is not Roman Catholics. The target is the American Criminal Justice System.’ He is only partly right.

“Mr. Kelley is correct to say that the principal target of the show is the American Criminal Justice System, but the program also provides a caricature of Church teachings on sexuality that helps promote a negative stereotype of Catholicism, thus feeding the apparently insatiable appetite that some Americans have—many of whom work in Hollywood—for lambasting the Catholic religion.

“It needs to be said one more time: the Church teaches that sexual expression outside the institution of marriage is

wrong. Gays are excluded from marriage because they do not hold forth the potential of creating new life. Married infertile couples are not barred from sex, any more than the aged or infirm are, precisely because nothing unnatural has been done to prohibit procreation.

“Furthermore, those who violate Church teachings are not ipso facto ‘morally evil’ persons. Indeed the sacrament of reconciliation allows for the forgiveness of any act, no matter how morally evil.

“Mr. Kelley’s long-standing fascination with Catholicism has already been noted by the Catholic League. It is hoped that he will satisfy his urge next time by getting the facts straight.”

After receiving the Catholic League’s news release, David Kelley wrote to Dr. Donohue defending the show by saying that the points made in the news release “were not only included in the program, they were made quite expressly, I thought.”